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# THE THANE OF CAWDOR



THE  
THANE OF CAWDOR

*A Detective Study of*

MACBETH

*by*

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## *Foreword*

THE narrative which follows is one of the detection of two murders; it is also an interpretation of the play of *Macbeth*, in which these crimes are dramatized.

In the play, we see the murderers plotting; but the narrator does not know what passed between them in secret. He has to find out the truth by the signs that the murderers left, and by any other conduct that accuses them.

The king of Scotland was found murdered in his bed in the castle of Macbeth, in very strange circumstances. Could this crime have been brought home to the Macbeths by evidence, before Lady Macbeth walked in her sleep and revealed the truth? Are they also proved guilty of the murder of Banquo, by the facts surrounding that deed?

This is the detective problem of *Macbeth*.

The narrative is supposed to be written by the physician who was in attendance on Lady Macbeth throughout. It must strictly agree with the text of the play, and only use such evidence as that text supplies. Some of that evidence is given in what passed between the Macbeths, so far as that describes what they did, and what the narrator would therefore find done. But he has to bring it home to the right persons. If what they did must have left any marks, by necessary inference, these marks become evidence.

Thus, if a murderer kills some one with two daggers, and rushes straight from the deed with both weapons to where

## FOREWORD

his accomplice is waiting for him outside, with both his own hands bloody, as we are told, then there must have been marks of blood where the daggers dripped. The truth was that Macbeth carried both the daggers out, and Lady Macbeth carried them back. This is where their plan miscarried, by leaving signs which the narrator had to interpret.

The narrative is an interpretation of the play, on which it throws new light. It shows how, in one place after another, Shakespeare intended us to observe things which hitherto have been passed over.

The two murders are connected with each other through the weird agency of the witches. This supplies an element of plot. The meeting which the narrator has with them in this story takes the place of their prophecies to Macbeth, and what they say does nothing more than bring out what is already known to us, and particularly some coincidences in the circumstances of the two murders, which enable them to speak with a double meaning.

The play of *Macbeth* is, in fact, one of the earliest exercises in the detection of murder. The narrative which follows might have been written in the manner of a modern detective story. But it has seemed better to write it so as not to derogate from the dignity of a great drama. What is brought out is nothing but the carefulness and subtlety of Shakespeare in his presentation of the acts and events which frame the central thought of nemesis.

The relation of the physician's narrative to the play has been emphasized by the use of words and phrases from

## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Thane of Cawdor*

I WRITE this tale in the castle of the high hill of Dunsinane, amid the alarms of war. 'Were I from Dunsinane away and clear, profit should hardly draw me here again.' The king, deserted by all the thanes, and with no leader left to him save Seyton, speaks and acts more and more like one in whom bravado has the likeness of a madness.<sup>1</sup> The queen, my patient, has now betrayed the terrible secret of the murder of Duncan, for I cannot doubt that the words spoken in her waking sleep, taken together with all that I have to relate, confirm the guilt of her husband and herself. But this is no place to remain in for one who has guessed that secret. Those who walk in their sleep may still have some dim consciousness, after they have awaked, of the words they have unguardedly spoken; and especially so, if there is guilt on their conscience. That the queen so suspects her physician of what he knows, is too likely for safety; for then the king may share the same suspicion; and I desire not, by delaying longer in the Court, to share the fate of Duncan, Banquo, and the rest.

The honour of a physician should keep him to his attendance, so long as the malady which called him thither is still without cure. But he does not desert from that, when, the malady is neither of the body nor of the mind, but of

<sup>1</sup> Act v, sc. iii.

## THE THANE OF CAWDOR

the conscience. "Therein the patient must minister to himself." The physician can provide no sweet oblivious antidote to cleanse the charged bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart. The gentlewoman, who has learned more than she will tell, will remain to attend the queen, not perceiving as I do the meaning of things, and the danger in which she may stand. But I am truly discharged by all that I know, and all that I fear. It is on my own conscience to record it all, from its fair beginning, when Macbeth had won fame and honour, through the dreadful tale of blood which followed, and is, I fear, not yet ended.

To be a spy is no thankful task, yet it came to me in the form of a duty. The physician's mind is trained to observe, and to reason on appearances of things that come to his attention. Of my own master of physic it was first said that he was one 'who putteth two and two together'. And in respect of many forms of crime, the physician may reason with fuller knowledge than ordinary men, knowing better of wounds, how they can have occurred and how not, and of bleeding, and the influence of poisons, and of other such things. And setting out from knowledge of this sort, he may apply his faculties of noting and observing, and of reaching conclusions by inference, so that his interest cannot be restrained from going to the end of the matter, even although it exceeds his private duty so to proceed. Hence I have spied in Macbeth's Court, but only to know the truth on what began in the shedding of blood, and in the marks

## THE THANE OF CAWDOR

of blood, things about whose meaning it came almost perforce into my province to decide.

For my own safety I must make my home in England, and will entrust this record to my son. Some day, perchance, after my lifetime, it may be discovered and made known, and some hand may even enlarge the tale, suggesting all I know not that may have passed in secret between the king and queen, as they schemed together to kill Duncan and Banquo, or how the witches of the heath cast their spell on those whom they led to their fate.

These events are mingled with a fantastical element, such as may disturb one's mind concerning influences of a more than natural sort upon human affairs. The weird sisters, as they were called, who foretold how I would come to know the truth about Duncan's death, giving me a riddle that was to have a wrong reading before the right one, had surely worked some spell upon Macbeth, and it may be, as I shall show, on Banquo also, which was to lead both to their undoing. It may be that their prophecies, of which Banquo often spoke, and whose seeming truth for Macbeth beset his mind concerning himself, were no more than idle suggestions made for the sake of mischief or flattery, out of common rumour that they had heard, or perhaps for some favour or reward. I say only that the wild antics and mockery with which they met me, when I yielded my judgement to the impulse to visit them, their horrible appearance and gestures, and the fearsome tones in which they chanted their hints of the murder of Duncan, to say nothing of how

## THE THANE OF CAWDOR

the fumes and foul exhalations of their reeking pot seemed to put the senses into a dream,—disposing any one to see in the twisting smoke the fantastic figures of his own fancy,<sup>1</sup>—were enough to disturb the most even mind, and somewhat to derange one less balanced.) A mere physician of the body can only wonder whether the appearance of prophecy is no more than trickery and chance, or whether through beings whose bodies seem to serve only to keep alive their excited wits, there is some passage of knowledge that is free of time.

But I must turn to relate events in their order. First, how I came to my knowledge of them. I was summoned to the castle of Inverness to be in attendance on Lady Macbeth, not long before her husband had gone to the fight against the rebels. Nothing could less suggest what was to come than the beautiful castle of Macbeth, with its pleasant seat, its sweet and nimble air, where on every jetty, frieze, buttress, and coign of vantage the martlet had its nest. Here I thought to pass an easy time, despite the raids which from many sides beset the country, with streams to fish in, and coverts to shoot.

I must say how it was that my attendance was needed, and how my hostess was ailing. Her disorder was of the nerves, so that she was afflicted by want of sleep, requiring a constant watchfulness and care, and the ordering of her rest and way of living. This malady of her disposition made her prone at times to petulance and anger over small things;

<sup>1</sup> As Macbeth did: Act iv, sc. i.

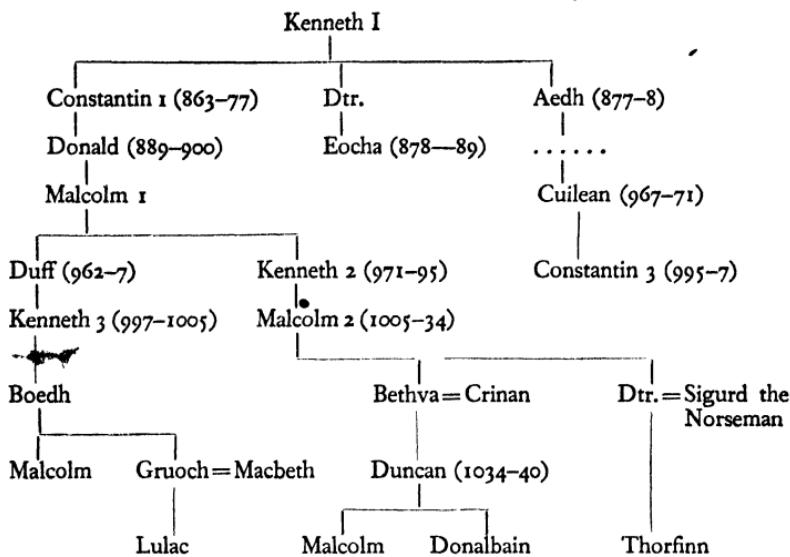
but nothing could exceed her graciousness when the mood passed. That her ailment might proceed from some physical cause, was my first concern; though she was of noble stature and bearing, as beffitted a daughter of the line of Duff, and of the house of Malcolm the First.

But I thought that there was something more than such a disorder that weighed upon her mind, and that she nursed some sense of wrong done to her house. Of this I can speak but briefly, for the issue was a confused one. King Duncan was grandson of Malcolm the Second, who had married his elder daughter Beatrice to the head of the house of Atholl. And Lady Macbeth was grand-daughter of King Kenneth, the cousin of Malcolm, and his predecessor on the throne. Now the Scots law of succession was the tanist law, whereby the crown did not go in direct descent, but alternately to the oldest survivor of any branch of the ancient house of Alpin. Thus, on the death of Malcolm, who succeeded Kenneth, the crown should have returned to the line of Kenneth. But Kenneth's own son Boedh was dead, and the male heir of his line was his grandson, brother of Lady Macbeth, at whose violent death it was thought that Malcolm had connived. So Malcolm had named his own grandson Duncan as heir to the crown, thus for the first time breaking the law of the alternate succession, for the reason that Kenneth's line had but a female survivor. Thus there were many who saw in Duncan a usurper of the throne, for once already it had passed through the female line, when Eocha was king.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> When King Aedh died (A.D. 878), he was succeeded, not of course by

## THE THANE OF CAWDOR

This is the nearer succession of the ancient house of Alpin:



Gruoch, Lady Macbeth, was widow of Gillecomgan, leader of Moray.

Crinan was lay Abbot of Dunkeld, and leader of Atholl.

The alternate succession, up to Malcolm the Second, is shown.

Now here came the cause of the feud. Lady Macbeth was married first to the leader of the house of Moray, and had by him a son, so that the Morays stood for her claims and those of her son Lulac. And Duncan's mother was married to the head of the Atholls, so these families contested the succession. No heir to Duncan was yet named, and the feud slept, while the kingdom was at war. But I thought that Lady Macbeth brooded over her wrongs, and feared his own son, but by Eocha, the son of his sister, who was preferred to Donald, the son of his brother.

that the Atholls would seek to confirm their house on the throne, if Duncan should name his own son as his heir, and make the ancient law of no account. Though Lulac was yet a child, Macbeth himself was not without a claim by his own right, having cousinship of a sort with Duncan, besides being now leader of the Morays, by his marriage to the widow of their leader. I have set all this out in order, showing how the alternate succession had been unbroken until Duncan, and how the female line was not barred when Eocha became king in earlier times. And I found that Lady Macbeth's gentlewoman was of the same mind as myself, by words overheard now and again between our lord and lady, and schemings and upbraiding interrupted on her approach,<sup>1</sup> that they conspired for their rights, and for requital for the murder which had removed Kenneth's male heir, Lady Macbeth's own brother.

Such brooding over fancied wrongs was ill for one of Lady Macbeth's disposition, and it was my service to administer a rule of living which would turn her mind to common things and duties. So I caused her to have in close attendance a gentlewoman who was skilled in the care of this ailment, and would carry out, by gentle persuasion, the rule which I advised.

I resume my tale. The king was in the chief camp near Forres. There was war against the rebels of Lochaber, who were in a revolt led by the infamous Macdonwald, of whose cruelties, even among his own folk, terrible tales were told.

<sup>1</sup> As in Act I, sc. vii: 'Art thou afear'd', &c.

## THE THANE OF CAWDOR

Banquo was leader of Lochaber,<sup>1</sup> and collected the revenues for the king. But the Macdonwald had seized the revenues, and murdered the officer whom Banquo had sent to collect them. He had set himself at the head of kerns and gallow-glasses from Ireland and the western isles, mercenaries hoping for the division of the spoil. The king had first sent his son Malcolm to quell the revolt, but the rebels were strong, and Malcolm had barely escaped captivity.<sup>2</sup> So a greater force had now been sent to Lochaber.

With the king were his two sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, and also Lennox. Macbeth was in the field, with Banquo and Ross. The thane of Cawdor had gone to gather his forces, one who stood high in the esteem of the king, though not near in blood. Of other thanes, Angus, Macduff, Menteith, and Caithness, we had not reports. Our messengers spoke of Macbeth and Banquo as leading the royal forces against the Macdonwald, and of Cawdor as having gone towards Fife. We trusted to our loyal thanes to bring us victory and peace, and in the castle at Inverness we eagerly awaited news of the conflict, and of which of our leaders would be acclaimed.

At length we had stirring news. Post after post, coming from the field,<sup>3</sup> spread the report, which they carried to Forres, that the day went well against the rebels, and every post spoke of the exploits of Macbeth, naming him above all the other leaders. Then a sergeant had ridden hard from

<sup>1</sup> This agrees with the best tradition.

<sup>2</sup> Act 1, sc. ii.

<sup>3</sup> Act 1, sc. iii.

## THE THANE OF CAWDOR

the field, still bleeding from his wounds, to be first with the tale of the rout of the Macdonwalds. His hirelings had fled in disorder, and their leader was slain in single combat by Macbeth himself. Thus was the country rid of a pest. The name of Macbeth was whispered for the throne. For leadership in war might well decide this issue. We were restless to have further news from Forres, most of all our lady, who was anxious and distraught, even in her pride.

But the conflicts were not ended with the rout of the Macdonwald's men. Before the royal forces could return, they were called to meet a sudden attack by Sweno of Norway, who had sought, in the distraction of the revolt, to raid our coasts. His banners had been carried into Fife, and the day<sup>1</sup> was not over for our leaders till this new danger had been encountered. It was Ross who brought at length to Forres the news of another victory, and of still greater honour to Macbeth and Banquo. Turning from the pursuit of Macdonwald's rabble, they had surprised the assault of Sweno, and forced him to surrender.

But here the report was mixed with evil tidings. The thane of Cawdor had been found disloyal to the king. He had betrayed a high trust and close friendship. Hoping, it would seem, that the great numbers which Sweno placed in the field would be sure to prevail over the royal forces, weakened by the other conflict, and that Norway would bestow some high favour for his support, Cawdor was

<sup>1</sup> 'The self-same day', in Act 1, sc. iii, is to be taken in the broad sense, e.g. the 'day of battle'.

## THE THANE OF CAWDOR

found among the king's enemies, and was a prisoner. From Forres we learned that sentence of death was pronounced upon him, and that his title was forfeit. Macbeth, who had won yet greater fame in this second fight, was made thane of Cawdor. Among his own folk of Moray, the report spread quickly.<sup>1</sup>

The throne had been saved, and indeed enriched. For the surrender of Norway was received only against a payment of ten thousand pieces of silver to our royal revenues. Nay more, the raider ~~must~~ pay it in good coin upon the spot, which he liked not, hoping to deceive us with his promise till he should be safe away. But he was compelled, or no truce would be given him to bury his dead, and it offended his gods that they should lie unburied.<sup>2</sup> That he should carry such treasure showed how he had hoped to seduce others than Cawdor from their allegiance.

But for whom was the throne saved? Here was the beginning of the dire chapter, which I have soon to write. As the king moved his court from the camp to the palace at Forres, with Macbeth's name on all men's lips, there was eager expectation that the king must restore the succession to his line; whether by favour or by the decision of events. For Macbeth was near in blood, and had won a double fame, while Malcolm had perforce fled from Lochaber to escape captivity.

I was sent by Lady Macbeth to greet her lord at Forres, and found ~~him~~ newly come to the palace, the king having

<sup>1</sup> As it would. Inverness was in Moravia.

<sup>2</sup> Act i, sc. ii, *fin.*

sent Ross and Angus to meet and escort him. Nothing could exceed the graciousness with which the king received him and Banquo, if words alone were payment. But the very moment had come, which the king must grasp, as all knew, not least the king himself. Wrapped in the fairest words of thanks and honour to Macbeth, he made his choice, and named his son Malcolm as his heir, with the title of Prince of Cumberland, which province had been lately ceded to Scotland. He was quick to make promises of honours to all others who had won them, and so to cover the breaking again of the tanist law, and the making of Atholl the one royal house of Scotland. There were quick glances between the thanes, for all knew that a die had been cast. But fair words did not cease, and Duncan would at once honour Macbeth by coming to his castle at Inverness to feast the success of his arms. And Macbeth answered him in like words, and took his leave. But I saw the cloud on his brow as he went.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Act I, sc. iv, *fin.*

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Witchery, Signs, and Portents*

I MUST turn a short while from the happenings of which the knowledge was my own, in order to show how the witches of the heath, or weird sisters, as they called themselves, came first into the course of the events which followed. Of this I came to know only at a later time, through converse with Banquo, who was affected in no ordinary way by his meeting with the sisters, and by how their prophecies seemed to fall out, so that he spoke of these things readily, trusting to the secret ear of a physician. That he was enticed to his death, through a concern to question them further, is now my belief; but whether Macbeth also sought further dealings with them, I know not, but can easily suppose it, if Banquo could not refrain.

There were many who knew of the weird sisters, and called them by this name. So, should any one ask, 'Saw you the weird sisters?', he would be answered yes, or no, and not, 'of whom do you speak?'<sup>1</sup>—for their doings were of many sorts, such as reading of signs, and telling of fortunes to passers-by. To make such doings appear more than natural, they used strange forms of speech, such as calling their leader Hecate, and their cave the pit of Acheron.<sup>2</sup> When they would pretend to read the future in the smoke of a boiling cauldron, they would make believe that the

<sup>1</sup> As in Act iv, sc. i.

<sup>2</sup> Act III, sc. v.

## WITCHERY, SIGNS, AND PORTENTS

pieces of carrion which they threw into it were such things as the liver of a blaspheming Jew, or the nose of a Turk, or a Tartar's lips, or a shark's maw, or a tiger's chaudron, or other horrible ingredients, to make their soothsayings seem magical to the common people. And they were cunning to know of things which were like to happen, or even had already happened, before others knew of them, and so to seem to foretell them, whether for alms or mischief. But whether they also had any true vision of things to come, my tale will show why I am torn this way and that for an answer.

Well then, putting together into one account all that Banquo let fall at one time or another, it was somehow in this way that it happened. As Macbeth and Banquo were returning from the fight with Norway, the witches met them as darkness was falling, where the way crossed the heath, some hours' ride from Forres.<sup>1</sup> (In the dim light, and with their wild attire blowing about them, they looked scarcely like inhabitants of the earth, but rather spectres rising from the gorse, hardly to be known even for what they were seen to be by the light of day. They hailed Macbeth as Glamis, which title already was his, and as Cawdor, and then as 'king hereafter', and Banquo as founder of a line of kings, and quickly vanished from sight.)

Now hard on this, came Ross and Angus by the way to meet Macbeth, having been sent by the king, and they too greeted him as thane of Cawdor, the new title which he now bore. Thus it was that a seeming prophecy quickly came

<sup>1</sup> Act i, sc. iii: 'How far is't called to Forres?'

## WITCHERY, SIGNS, AND PORTENTS

true for Macbeth, such as might incline him to greater hopes, and Banquo also, if he took it for prophecy.) And all the more, because of this, when Macbeth came to Forres, his hopes were to be quickly dashed, when Malcolm was made heir. But Malcolm was not yet of full age, and Duncan well on in years, so room was left for the chances which fate might bring about.

This is how I put it together at the time but, when I read backward from the end of the story, how does it all seem? Was it not already known to the witches, though not to Macbeth, that he was made thane of Cawdor? Would not the news have time to spread among his own folk of Moray while he was on his way back from the fight? And of his being king hereafter, was it not likely enough, being first in the alternate succession by his marriage to the granddaughter of Kenneth, as well as by nearness of blood to Duncan, and all the more by the fame of his exploits, which the messengers would tell of as they passed toward Forres?

But, with all said, though I see no prophecy that is out of the common, how might not Macbeth be disposed to give his ear to them, if he nursed the grievance of his house, and their words fitted his thoughts?

Of this, nothing was known to me when I set myself to unravel the murder of Duncan by its own signs. But if Macbeth so lent his ear to the witches, and plotted to kill the king, there was reason to do it quickly, before Malcolm was of an age to come to the throne, and rashness goes well with credulousness, both outpacing judgement.

## WITCHERY, SIGNS, AND PORTENTS

But as to this meeting of the witches with Macbeth, there is another question in my mind or, I might call it, a far guess. Was it only by chance that they met with him and Banquo? There was some remark of Banquo's of how a drum sounded, as if to give warning of their approach.<sup>1</sup> Then by whom, and to what end, was this warning given? Here again I must read backward from what I came to know only at a later time. Who would set the witches to stop Macbeth's ~~wax~~ across the heath, when the battle was done, and cause them to be warned of his approach? •

Do I guess right that Lady Macbeth herself, hearing of his exploits, and seeing how they gave a new strength to his claims, if opportunity were seized, sought by the help of the witches to screw his courage to the sticking place of his ambition? Then some message had gone from her to the hags, how they were to meet again, and when, and where, and with Macbeth, and how they should be warned when he was at hand.<sup>2</sup> And their prophecy to Banquo, when they found him with Macbeth, would be an idle one, made for the moment.

It may be so, that Lady Macbeth sought such metaphysical aid to her designs, to urge her husband on in the hour of his fame. And then, if the coming of Duncan to Inverness gave a speedy opportunity, would she not rally him to the deed, being ready in her purpose, if he was unready? And his

<sup>1</sup> Act I, sc. iii: 'Drum within.'

<sup>2</sup> Act I, sc. i. Two of the witches appear to be telling the third of the arrangement.

## WITCHERY, SIGNS, AND PORTENTS

unreadiness, and her readiness, would agree with how he shrank from meeting Duncan, as his duty was, at the gate of his castle, and how she alone met the king, as I shall relate.

Then, if it be so, what is in my knowledge joins with what I learned from Banquo of the meeting with the witches. But before I tell how Duncan came to the castle of Inverness, it is an easy passage from witchery to signs and portents, which are of a piece with witchery. Let those who may read my tale say if I too am bewitched to mention such things.

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I returned to Inverness to find the castle still astir with the fame of Macbeth's exploits. Lady Macbeth was in high spirits and great good humour, having received a message from Macbeth which, the gentlewoman said, she kept with her, and often read over to herself. How Macbeth was thane of Cawdor, was known to all; but of the greater news, of the king's heir, no mention. So I supposed no messenger had come before me from the palace, and this the more likely since there was yet no news of the king's visit, which Duncan had made known the same day. So Macbeth's message was sent to his wife before the king's choice was made, telling her perchance of the victory, and of the witches' greeting, as it now seems to me he would do. It was no part of mine to give the news which would set back her hopes; nor did I need, for a messenger from Forres came quickly on my heels, to say that Duncan and his court were

## WITCHERY, SIGNS, AND PORTENTS

making ready to come that same day to Inverness to do honour to the new thane of Cawdor. Soon enough she would know the rest. Macbeth too, the messenger said, was on his way.

If all had gone well, I would not speak of portents. But after things of a dreadful sort have been done, and the murder of a king above all, it is no trifling with the story, but gives a dark frame to such bloody work, if I recall, like shadows thrown on events to come, what would else have passed from my mind as idle talk. If there be witchery, there may be portents elsewhere than in their minds, and I would wish those into whose hands my tale may come to know all of it, both those who set any store by such things as are called portents and those who make light of them. We are wiser about events after them, and we see how they hang on others before them; or so at least when Duncan's murder, that now is a present horror, shall have become but a tale, which fancy shall charge with dark meanings.

Of the lesser of these portents I will speak first. There were some who would have dissuaded the king from his journey to Inverness, while the naming of the heir was newly done, and until the Morays should have made plain whether they would be well disposed toward the king's choice, or not. But Duncan was quick to appease them, promising honours and titles of nobleness to all who had deserved them. And first among all to Macbeth, in whose castle he would feast the victory. But it was said that, as the king prepared to set out for Inverness, his horses

## WITCHERY, SIGNS, AND PORTENTS

refused to be mounted; they broke from their stalls and ran wild, as if they smelled danger to their master, and contended against the journey; and this although they were steeds of no common breeding, but trained in obedience, the very minions of their race. Some said even that they bit savagely at each other, as if a devil possessed them. The report of this went about—for it was no small wonder—and was taken afterwards for an omen that the journey was ill-fated. Of this portent, being an ill one, it was forbidden on such a day to speak openly, but men and women, as they gathered to see the king's retinue depart, muttered it to each other.

But there was a portent of deeper omen, which was said to have come from the very elements. Never, even in the lifetime of old men, who had reached their threescore years and ten, was such a night of tempest remembered as that which gathered over the last sleep of Duncan. So black was the darkness which fell that, even when the night had passed, and it was full day by the clock, the face of the earth seemed to be entombed, when there should have been living light upon it. And more than this, what none could remember having heard tell of in Scotland, the ground itself was said to have shaken, like a man in fever. (And there were some who thought that they heard, above the howling of the wolf, lamentings in the air, as of spirits who saw dreadful things they could not avert, and answering shrieks, as of demons who mocked them.) Those who so spoke were the dwellers near the heath, or some who crossed it that night, when we

## WITCHERY, SIGNS, AND PORTENTS

were shut in to our carousals. That the night was wild, so as to blow our chimneys down upon us, is in my own memory. And it may be that those who so spoke of it misread their own memories and deceived themselves in order to match the horror of such a deed (as it was first accepted) as the murder of the king by his own sons. Yet signs and portents have been spoken of before in this way—such as flaming stars passing across the heavens—by men of good faith and understanding, when dire events were happening. And when should they come, if not to show the deep damnation of the taking off, by murder most foul and sacrilegious, of a king both meek and gentle? So let it stand that such portents were spread abroad.<sup>1</sup>

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We made ready for the king's visit. He would remain only one night at the castle. All the thanes who were at Forres would come in his retinue, and his own chamberlains, the officers of his guard, as befitted his state and the degree in which he honoured Macbeth.

Messengers came hard on each other to prepare us. We learned that Macbeth would arrive before the king, as was his duty, so as to meet Duncan at the gate and offer him the service of his house. This was no mere courtesy, but an office owed to the king when he had announced his coming. It would be no small omission to fail in it, with the thanes in attendance on Duncan.

<sup>1</sup> Act II, sc. iv.

## WITCHERY, SIGNS, AND PORTENTS

A messenger, indeed, was charged by Macbeth to make speed that we might be told of his earlier arrival. Scarcely had we his report than we heard the footsteps of Macbeth's own horses. On the threshold of their apartments Lady Macbeth greeted him proudly as Glamis and Cawdor.

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It was the evening of a short day when the king arrived, with hautboys and torches. With him came Malcolm and Donalbain, Banquo, Lennox, Macduff, Ross, and Angus. With ourselves and their attendants the room of the castle would be well taxed. There was a gate in the inner court (as I will show) called the south entry, through which there was access to some apartments that were not often in use, and were in ill repair; but there to-night two of our guests must be lodged. Of this, and what hung upon it, more hereafter. We made ready the best rooms, and prepared the feast. Fleance, the son of Banquo, came later to the castle, his horse having been lamed.<sup>1</sup>

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There were signs that already all was not well. Of what had passed between Macbeth and his wife, I cannot speak, but that it was something untoward and disturbing I could readily see. For how else should Macbeth not come to meet the king at the gate? Why should he speed ahead to

<sup>1</sup> He is not mentioned among those arriving with Duncan in Act I. sc. vi, but was in the castle later.

## WITCHERY, SIGNS, AND PORTENTS

welcome Duncan, and not do so? He stayed within, while Lady Macbeth met the king alone. Nor did the king fail, albeit there were fair words between him and her, to observe Macbeth's absence, and ask where was the thane of Cawdor, smoothing the sharp question with excuses gracious but marked.

Was a plot already made? Did Macbeth shrink from wearing a mask of welcome over designs against one who came in double trust, both as kinsman and king? What feelings estranged him from the outward courtesy of a host? Was it so soon as this that Lady Macbeth could urge him to a deed from which he shrank? On her face was no sign, and she played her part, offering to the king in double measure the service of her house, with grateful words for the honours bestowed upon it. Yet by this it seemed all the more strange that her husband was not at her side, and to the king's question she gave no answer or excuse.<sup>1</sup>

This was no small thing, when the king came with his thanes and retinue, as it were in full ceremony and state, and after having announced that he would come. There was no word said by any of the thanes who saw how it was, even if some guessed that Macbeth dared to show in this manner that he was not to be paid in small coin, by some visit of state to his castle, for the putting aside of the claims of his adopted house. And if the thanes marked it only with silence at this time, would it not be quick to come to their memories in the morning, after a deed that confounded belief?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Act i, sc. vi.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 38.

## WITCHERY, SIGNS, AND PORTENTS

Nor was this the only time on that night, as I will show, when the king must ask for his host, and find him failing in his observance. Was the breach already opening? Duncan would stay but one night—was opportunity so quick?

Or did I suppose signs where there were none? Was it some small thing that kept Macbeth from his duty? Yet I could not think that he would fail in it for any small cause.

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Thus, with the king and prince, and the thanes of Scotland our honoured guests, and the country made safe from war for a time, we prepared to pass the night with feasting and revels. It came down a wild night of tempest; the owl shrieked, and the wind howled over the heath. But within the castle was rejoicing till night wore to morning—the morning of which my pen must tell the dreadful tale.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Macbeth's Castle*

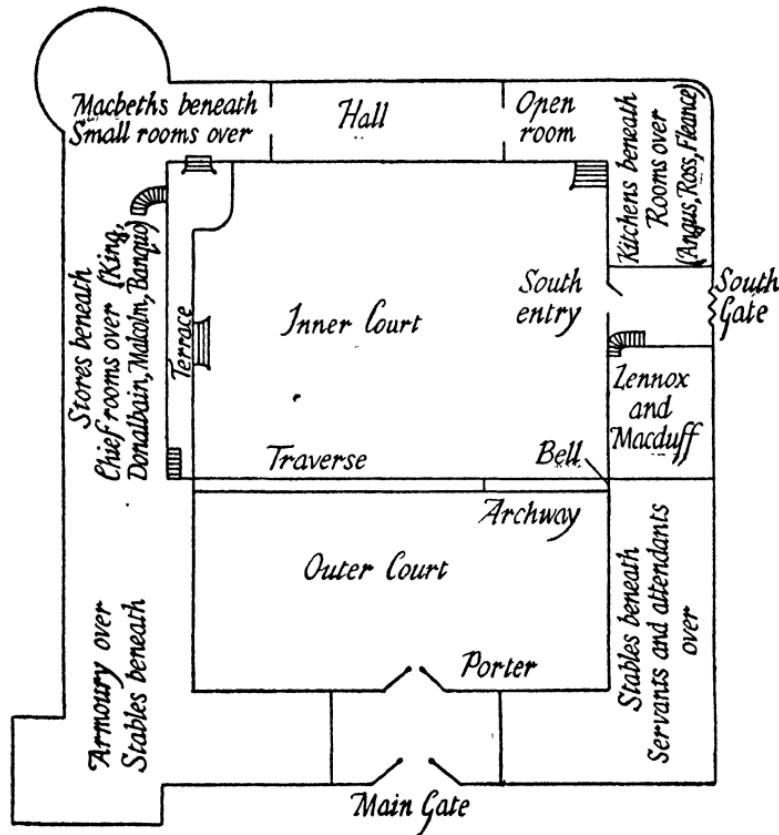
HERE I find that I should make a pause, if my tale of the murder is not to be obscure, so as to show how the castle of Inverness was arranged, and how we were all lodged, and where the chief happenings took place. For, in order to unravel how such a deed could be done, all these things must be observed, so that the places as well as the times shall fit the account of it. And, to make more plain what these places were, I have made a sort of bare picture of how the castle was built, and then also one of the rooms which were near that of the king; having small skill in the art of drawing, but doing the best I can.<sup>1</sup>

The castle of Macbeth was built on a small rise of the ground, round which was a dry moat, and the chief gate faced a bridge over the moat. It was strongly built of stone, but of no regular formation, having one round buttress and one square, and the other corners bare. It was of rough masonry, but the seat was pleasant, and made well secure against attack. About it lay the heath, and the dwellings of the common folk, and not far off the road ran toward Forres.

First, concerning the gates of the castle. There were two gates. The chief gate looked to the west, and had an inner door, beside which the porter had a lodging. It led

<sup>1</sup> The physician's plans have been more neatly shown.

## MACBETH'S CASTLE



into the outer court, in which there were stables for horses, and above these were rooms for servants and attendants, and a place where arms were kept.

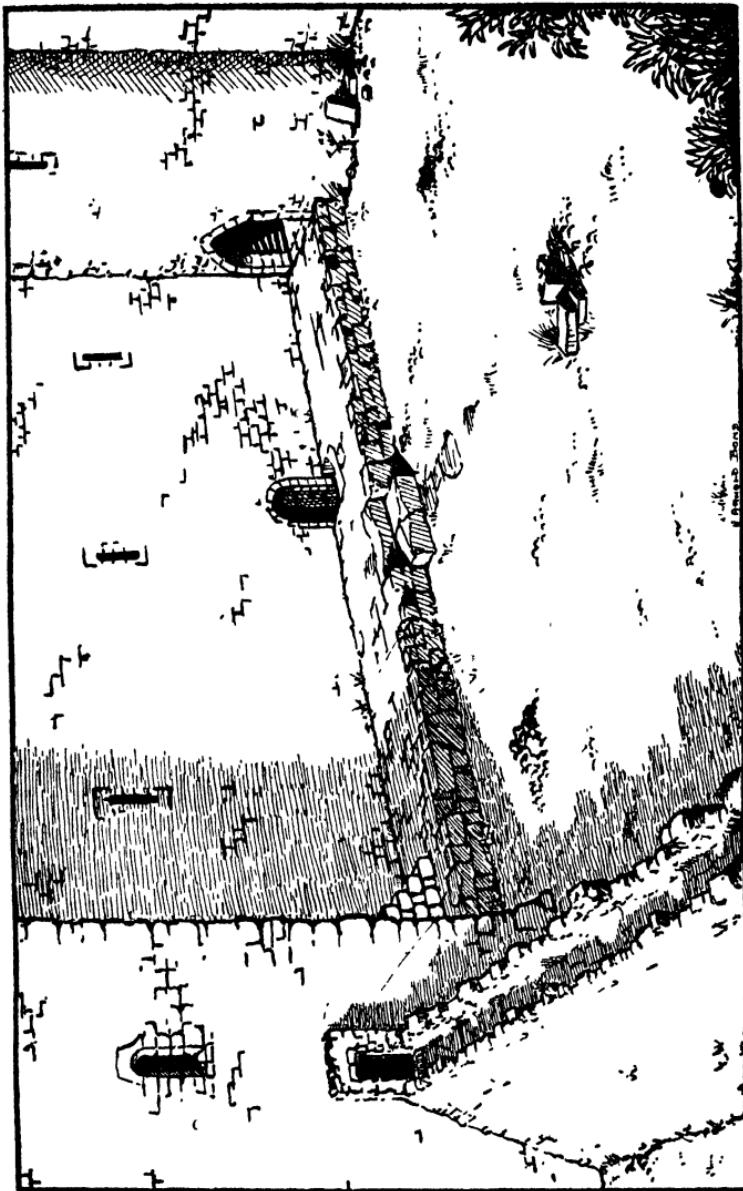
There was another gate in the southern wall of the castle, and within this gate was a door, which was called the 'south entry'.<sup>1</sup> The south entry was in the inner wall of the court, so

<sup>1</sup> Act II, sc. ii, fin.

that between it and the gate there was a space, and steps to some apartments. But the southern gate was seldom seen open, and was always closely barred during my attendance, and the apartments were seldom used, and in some disrepair. And therefore it was that the door called the south entry had its locks and hinges rusted by want of use. Let this be well observed. For it was at this door that much knocking was heard both in the night and in the morning when those who were lodged outside it were alarmed, and could not make it to open. The south gate and entry gave into the inner court, as if meant to provide an approach to the chief rooms which should not pass by the stables and the apartments of the servants.

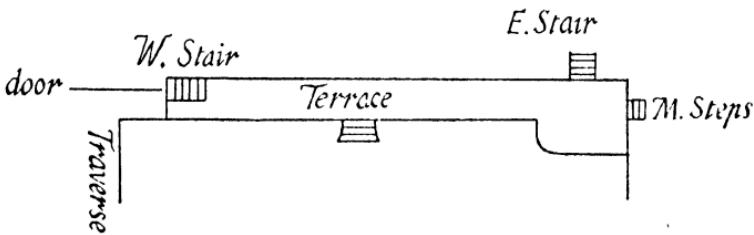
There was a traverse between the inner and the outer court, made of earth and rough blocks of stone, and an archway joining the two courts at one end of it. A man could walk on the top of the traverse; the alarm bell of the castle was set at one end of it in a niche of the wall, between the two courts.

Now the arrangement of the inner court must be observed carefully, for it is of a murder I have to tell, and of the goings to and fro of all who were in the castle. To make it plain, I will first suppose some one to stand in this court, having the traverse at his back. Then, on the side in front of him, is the hall of the castle; in the wall on his right hand is the south entry; on his left hand are places to hold stores, on the lower level, and the chief rooms for guests on the upper landing.



*The Terrace & Stairways*

But, on this left side, there is a low terrace, which runs along the side of the court, and is reached by some steps near its middle. He will see that, at its far end, the terrace leads through an open arch into a covered space. From the terrace, there are two stairways to the upper landing, one at each end, west and east. The first is through a door at the end next to where the traverse joins the wall on that side, and the other rises out of the covered space into which the terrace runs at the far corner. So the stairways give on the upper landing at opposite ends of the chief rooms for guests, which can be reached by either stairway. It may be pictured thus:



The king's apartment on the night of the murder was close to where the western stair came on the upper landing. It was on this terrace that Banquo and Fleance, having seen the king to bed, and descended by the western stair, met with Macbeth some time after midnight, as will be shown.<sup>1</sup> It was by the same western stair that Macduff went to wait on the king in the morning, when he discovered the murder, Macbeth having shown him the door from the terrace.<sup>2</sup> It was by the eastern stair that he descended,

<sup>1</sup> Act II, sc. i.

<sup>2</sup> 'This is the door.' Act II, sc. iii.

## MACBETH'S CASTLE

when he rushed past the rooms of the guests to wake them and give the alarm.

But I must finish the description of the court, and the rooms. First, I show how, out of the covered space, steps went also to the apartments of the Macbeths, which were in this corner of the court, and there was an entrance from them to the hall. These were low steps, and above the apartments of the Macbeths was a room in which I slept, and which was reached by mounting from the upper landing of the eastern stairway:

The covered space was a place where we were used to meet, being well placed for this by relation to the rooms, and having stone seats let into the wall, and places to hold torches. So it was here that we met when the alarm bell roused us to hear the dreadful news.<sup>1</sup>

Now as to the other sides of the court. I have said how the hall filled one side, opposite the traverse. But it did not take up all of the side, to speak more exactly. Any one facing the hall, as I have supposed, would see some steps in the corner on his right hand, and these led into an open room of sorts, which was between that end of the hall and the kitchens, so that the servants carried the dishes across it.<sup>2</sup> It was in this open room that Lady Macbeth sought her husband, when he left the feast before the king had risen, so that the king had to ask for him, as he had asked for him

<sup>1</sup> It was here also that Lady Macbeth awaited her husband, when he came from the murder, for he came past the guests' rooms, and descended to her. *Act ii, sc. ii: 'As I descended.'*

<sup>2</sup> This is the scene of *Act i, sc. vii.*

once already at the gate; and, finding him absent, was escorted to his apartment by Banquo, though this was Macbeth's duty as the host.

Over the kitchens, in this corner of the court, were other rooms for guests. On the night of the murder, Ross, Angus, and Fleance slept in these. Their windows looked outwards from the walls of the castle, and not into the court. And this, I think, is why they did not join us in the morning,<sup>1</sup> when the alarm was given, as the sound of the bell would not reach them clearly, and they slept heavily after the feast.

Now, lastly, of the side of the court where the south entry was, opposite the terraced side. The apartments were reached through the south entry to the court. They were in disrepair, but were got ready because of the number of our guests. And, the night being wilder than most could remember, the chimneys of these apartments were blown down.<sup>2</sup> Lennox and Macduff slept in these apartments. When the chimneys were blown down, about two of the clock, they rushed in alarm to the south entry, but could not make it open, and knocked loudly upon it but, not being heard by the porter (for the servants caroused late),<sup>3</sup> returned to their rooms. So later, when Macduff went in the morning to attend the king, as he had been commanded, he must knock again, till the porter opened the door.

Thus I have shown how we were all lodged. Lennox and

<sup>1</sup> They are not in Act II, sc. iii.

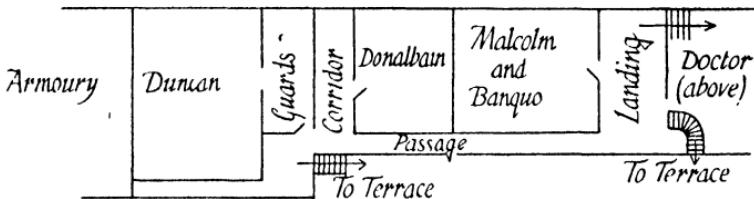
<sup>2</sup> Act II, sc. iii.

<sup>3</sup> Act II, sc. iii: 'Till the second cock', or three o'clock.

## MACBETH'S CASTLE

Macduff were shut out from the court. Ross, Fleance, and Angus were in the rooms far from the chief rooms; so it was Banquo, Malcolm, and Donalbain who were in the chief rooms on the landing beside the king and his guards.

But the events of the night will not be plain enough, till I have shown in a more exact way how the chief apartments were arranged, and what passages there were. On this it all hung, when I sought to unravel the murder. So I have made



another picture, hoping to give something of the nature of a key to my reasonings, which were otherwise not so easy to follow out.

There were two stairways from the terrace to the upper landing. Between the places where these stairways gave on to the landing, a passage ran along the inner side of the landing, next to the court. And now my picture sets, as it were, the stage for the crime.

Duncan lay next to the armoury, close to where the western stair reached the landing. In the second chamber was Donalbain. Then there were two lodged together, Malcolm and Banquo.<sup>1</sup> So it was these three on whom Macduff called to awake, as he rushed past their rooms along

<sup>1</sup> Act II, sc. ii.

age to the eastern stairway, when he found the king  
screamed.<sup>1</sup>

It was along this passage that I saw the stains of blood, going from the king's apartment for some way, something more than half the distance to the far stairway. There was a space, like a small corridor, between the king's room and Donalbain's, lit by a window, which caused this part of the passage to be well lit, so that the stains showed clearly.

I have gone ahead of my tale to explain all this, but will show how I came to know by which stairways each of the thanes came and went.

How my own apartment was reached, is plain enough in my picture. It had a window which looked on the court, so I could hear sounds of voices on the terrace, and the fall of the chimneys, and the knockings, and other sounds.

And now I will search my memory to relate the night's business, both before and after the alarm bell broke my rest.

<sup>1</sup> Act II, sc. iii. The lodgement of all the guests is strictly proved by coincidence of evidence from the text of Shakespeare.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Night and the Morning*

I WILL now set out the events of the night, being those only which were known to myself, so far as I can recall them. Not thinking that I would have reason to mark them, I could not have fixed their order with any care, at the time when they happened, but have rallied my memory to give the best account it may.

There were festivities both in the outer court, among the servants and retainers, and in the hall of the castle. The king supped with the thanes, and there was talk of the battles, and of how any further rebellion could be held in check. We pledged the new Prince of Cumberland, with the seeming assent of all. The king was in great good humour, and measureless content. It was near midnight when he prepared to retire, and looked round for his host, who should escort him to his room.

But Macbeth, when the king sought him, was absent from the hall, so that the king asked for him,<sup>1</sup> as already that day he had asked for him at the gate. This made a pause, and we were not at our ease. Then Lady Macbeth went out to seek her husband, by the door where the hall was entered from the open room at that end. We excused our host, as having perhaps gone to see that all was prepared in the king's chamber. But the king, having waited a short while,

<sup>1</sup> Act I, sc. vii: 'Hath he asked for me?' 'Know you not he has?'

## THE NIGHT AND THE MORNING

rose to leave the table, and his chamberlains with him. He was gracious, as was his manner, as if allowing the excuse for the want of due ceremony. So we stood to bid him good-night. We little deemed that it was a longer farewell.

Next, I recall that, as the door of the hall opened for Lady Macbeth, going to seek her husband, I saw Macbeth in the open room beyond. He was pacing slowly, as if irresolute, or seeking converse with some one, or troubled about some matter. So he had not gone to see the king's chamber prepared. Yet he came not back to the hall, despite the king having asked for him, as if he wished not to be last with the king that night.

Thus it was that it fell to Banquo to escort the king to his room, and the king with a gesture of favour beckoned Fleance also; for Banquo was that day high in the esteem of the king, who had honoured him in word and pledge. And it was thus also that it was Macduff, and not Macbeth, who had the king's command to wait on him in the morning.

I have dwelt on how Macbeth thus twice refused, or it may be shrank from, his own observance to the king on that day, seeing now, as I write, that it may have been conscience that smote him, if he planned to murder Duncan, no less than fear to be seen last with the king.

But it fell out well for Macbeth, whether by design or not, that he was not last with the king that night, nor first with him in the morning.

Then, of the other events, after we had all retired, my memory is somewhat confused. It was a wild night, and

## THE NIGHT AND THE MORNING

dark, so that our servants bore torches. We had been merry with wine and wassail, which does not serve to give a quiet night. My sleep was disturbed. I had not long retired when I heard some talk in the court, or, as it seemed, on the terrace, and guessed the voices to be those of Macbeth and Banquo. This was well after midnight, and not long thereafter I heard two strokes of a clock. I thought also that I heard, near this time, the sound of a bell or a gong struck. Being but one stroke, and the clock having struck two, this must be some chamber bell, most likely in Macbeth's quarters beneath. It was struck loud enough to be heard in the court outside. Of this, my memory, when challenged, is sure enough.<sup>1</sup>

Then, I was still not asleep, but drowsing, when a noise of falling masonry alarmed me, as if chimneys were blown down. I judged this noise to come from near the southern entry, knowing also that there was disrepair of the building there. Upon this came knocking,<sup>2</sup> repeated more than once, as if others also were alarmed. I made to rise and assure myself, but the knocking ceased, and all was quiet again outside. But it seemed that my host was disturbed, for there were murmurs of voices beneath me. Also, some voice seemed to call out in the guests' chambers some word of alarm, which I heard indistinctly, so that I rose and called in the passage,<sup>3</sup> but heard nothing further. Of the order of

<sup>1</sup> Act II, sc. i.

<sup>2</sup> This was the knocking the Macbeths heard as they went to bed.

<sup>3</sup> Lady Macbeth seems to have heard a voice. 'Did you not speak?' 'When?' 'Now.' 'As I descended?' 'Ay.' Act II, sc. ii.

these events, my memory is not clear and distinct. Then I slept.

It was morning when I was awakened by loud knocking at the south entry, and I thought of how the porter might have forgot to leave this door free for the guests lodged there. I heard his voice as he went to release it, and the grating of the hinges, and voices which I guessed were those of Lennox and Macduff. I surmised it was near eight of the clock, and few were yet stirring, for the servants caroused till late.

And then—as I dressed myself, a wild and almost frenzied shouting called on the household to awake; the great bell of the castle clanged a loud alarm; a confusion of voices and of hurrying footsteps portended some dreadful event. Was rebellion at our gates? Was our castle attacked? It was work more foul than this. Hastily I put on attire, and rushed to the eastern stairway, to hear that the king was murdered in his sleep.

In the vaulted archway of the terrace, at the foot of the stairway, stood Macduff alone.<sup>1</sup> As I came, and was near the foot of the stairway, Lady Macbeth came from her apartments, asking what business called for the alarm bell, but he feared to tell her. Then Banquo passed me going down, and to him Macduff gave the news. Then Macbeth and Lennox came from the royal chamber, whither they had rushed at the alarm. Then Malcolm and Donalbain, asking what was amiss. I stood within the stairway, and heard the tale.

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<sup>1</sup> See Act II, sc. iii, for the order of the events which follow.

## THE NIGHT AND THE MORNING

Macduff had the king's command to attend betimes upon him. Finding that the southern door, where he and Lennox were lodged, did not open freely, they had knocked loudly, till the porter released them, and had waked Macbeth, who met them in the court. Macbeth had shown Macduff the door of the stairway at the western end of the terrace, as the readiest way to his royal master. So Macduff was first to know of the murder, and had rushed through the inner passage to give the alarm to the guests, and to Macbeth, whom with Lennox he found in the covered space of which I have spoken. Stricken with horror, he named the crime, and bid them to the royal chamber, whither they rushed, while he shouted to rouse the house, and the bell was rung.

Ross, Angus, and Fleance, who slept across the court, had not joined us. From Lennox and Macbeth we heard of the deed. The king was stabbed to death. His own trusted guards had killed him. It was no secret crime, but the work of desperate men, heedless for themselves. Their daggers, bloodstained to the hilt, lay unsheathed upon their pillows. Even their faces reeked with blood. A drunken stupor, it would seem, had overcome them before they could escape, or conceal their crime. For which, however, they would never be called to account on earth; for, in fury that so foul a murder should have disgraced his house, Macbeth had slain them with his own hand. I thrilled with horror at such treachery; small wonder that Lady Macbeth should swoon to hear of it, and that I must carry her to her couch. The king's sons, one of them now our liege lord, stood apart,

with a paleness that bespoke wrath or fear, speaking to none, but whispering in low tones to each other.

Yet I thought that I perceived more than this. There was more than horror in the eyes of the thanes. There was an unbelieving look, at the very openness of the outrage, as if more must be to tell. What treachery was behind? On whose assurance, which had failed them, had the murderers relied? Whom might they have accused as their master and betrayer, were their tongues not silenced? Yet the hand that silenced them was Macbeth's own. Thoughts which one feared to think rushed through our confused minds. For the crime was all too plain for believing. Our thoughts were rallied from grief to the purpose of unmasking what deeper design might lie hidden, by Banquo, protesting for us all. In the hall of the castle we were shortly to meet to take counsel.

And there we met, but not all. The king's sons had called for their horses and fled the castle. We gazed on each other with unbelieving wonder. We could not speak. Rather our doubts, than such a confession.<sup>1</sup> The fair name of Scotland was fouled. Lowering skies, though it was now day, seemed to share our shame. The thanedom of the realm must find a new allegiance. They declared for Macbeth. There could be no delay; for what new treachery might be pending? And no meaning could be seen in such a parricide, unless it were that Malcolm were in some league with the king of England, paid by some shameful bribe to

<sup>1</sup> Act II, sc. iv. Their flight put upon them 'suspicion of the deed'.

## THE NIGHT AND THE MORNING

be a vassal of Edward. Yet, with Macbeth proclaimed, I thought that each thane turned doubtfully on his heel to leave the hall; as if it came to their minds how Macbeth had treated Duncan with less than due courtesy at his gate and at the feast, and had killed the guards, so that they knew not how to think about it, had there been time.

But the things of the moment needed our care; and first, the fitting burial of Duncan, in the sacred soil of Colme-kill.

My duty called me to the chamber where the king lay dead. And here were set afoot the doubts which grew, with further knowledge which I gained of the doings of the night, to the certainty which makes me fear to stay at Dunsinane.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *The Bier and the Blood*

IT was my office to prepare for burial the body of the king, and I went forthwith to his chamber, full of wonder at what I might discover, for the tale of the crime filled my mind with questioning. And I was to find marks and signs that were hard to read.

The king lay on his couch, his body gashed and stabbed with deep wounds, from which much blood had flowed. The covering was drawn from his breast, and also his night attire, showing that a dagger had pierced his breast below the throat. No other wound was needed beyond that to accomplish his murder, but the murderer had dealt other dreadful blows, both gashes and stabs. I supposed he had been dead some six hours, and it was now past eight of the clock. Upon his body, blood had marked the wrinkles, like a golden lace-work on his silver skin.

But as I was about to compose his limbs, and to wash off the blood, I saw that upon his breast, where the blood was thickest, it was not evenly congealed. It was as if, ere it ceased to flow, it had been wiped or smeared off in one place.<sup>1</sup> Here it was more thinly congealed. This set me to wonder, for I was sure that Duncan's own hand had never moved after he was struck, and I was first to attend his body.

<sup>1</sup> Lady Macbeth had smeared the daggers and the guards' faces. Act II, sc. ii.

## THE BIER AND THE BLOOD

Having done my office to the king, I turned to observe the dead grooms. They lay upon their couches, stabbed in the body, with blood showing through. On their cheeks also there was blood which had not flowed from wounds, but was formed in blotches, or like badges, as if the king's wounds had shot ~~his~~ blood in their faces. Near them the cups of their night possets lay upset. Such cups would not alone make men drunken, but I stopped not at the time to consider this. Their daggers lay bare upon their pillows, with the blood hardened upon them, the terrible witness of their crime. Had they slain the king before they became drunken, or had their drink so overcome them that they scarce knew their own deed? Neither way was plain to my mind. Not the first, if they had not sought to escape after the murder; nor the second, for they showed not, as they lay, the disordered or tousled appearance of drunken men.

Wondering over this, I perceived the daggers again. Upon each was hardened blood, up to the ~~l~~udgeon. It seemed that both daggers had been used to kill the king. This was a strange thing, as if one dagger did not suffice; or as if they must, for some cause, share between them the guilt of the deed, or the vengeance for some wrong. I wondered what this could mean, and why they should reveal their crime in this way.

Then I looked closer at the daggers, and saw that the blood had not congealed evenly, but there were blotches or gouts upon the blades, as if each of the chamberlains had, in a dreadful bravado, placed a badge of his deed on his own

## THE BIER AND THE BLOOD

weapon.<sup>1</sup> For no dagger would have been so marked or smeared only by being drawn back from a stab. Foul work indeed, I thought, for the hands of the king's own trusted men.

Though my duty as physician was soon done, these things caused me to look around the place for other signs of how the treachery had been carried through. For the physician, as I have said, is trained above most men to reason from signs to their causes, and here the signs were those which belonged to my own art, such as the stains of blood, and their hardening or congelation.

Now the corridor next to where the chamberlains slept was lit, as I have said, by a large window at one end, the other end meeting the inner passage where it turned.<sup>2</sup> Here a smaller window gave further light. Along the centre of the passage rough matting was laid, but the stone paving was well clear on either side. And as I came near the corridor, musing to myself, and looking on the ground, I saw that there were stains of blood on the pavement, and followed them some way from the door of the chamberlains' apartment along the passage toward its eastern end. And it was new blood, scarcely yet hardened. I traced the drops along the passage. They were fainter as I went farther, but could still be seen for some paces. But, as I retraced my steps, it surprised me to find them not on one side of the passage, but on both; not opposite to each other, but at unequal

<sup>1</sup> 'Their hands and faces were all badged with blood, So were their daggers.' Act II, sc. iii.

<sup>2</sup> See the plan.

## THE BIER AND THE BLOOD

distances. Now how was this? For, if the chamberlains had killed the king, they must have rushed from the ante-chamber with their daggers still dripping, along the passage. But they were found by Macduff on their couches, with their daggers upon their pillows.

If they took to flight, they were conscious of their crime, and in their full senses, and why should they return to lay their daggers so open, and not give some other appearance to the murder?

This was not all the guessing to which I was put. For if each chamberlain had carried a dagger still reeking with blood, how should the blood drip on both sides of the passage? For each would carry his dagger in the right hand, and so blood would drip on the right side of the passage and in the middle, but not on the left side. Must I suppose that of the chamberlains one had his left hand the stronger, and that this one chanced to walk on the left of the passage? That one of them carried both daggers, and the other none, was not to be believed. And, saving all this, for what reason should the chamberlains, or either of them, bear their naked and dripping daggers outside the door of their own chamber? Had they sought escape, and found it cut off? Then by whom, for none had spoken of seeing them.

Or was it Macbeth's weapon which had dripped, after he had slain the chamberlains? But would he not put up his sword forthwith? How should it mark the passage on both hands for such a length?

Here was an entanglement of marks and signs, so that it

## Colme-kill THE BIER AND THE BLOOD

was no simple thing to say what was the meaning of them all. But I made note of all these things, to consider them at my greater leisure. For the bearers came, to encoffin the king for his burial. The same day, his body was taken on its journey to Colme-kill, and with it went all the thanes. The king would be crowned at Scone on his return, and the Court would move to Forres. Silence fell again upon the castle, but not the peace of but two days before. With my mind so full of questions, I could not fall into my former ways, but set myself to discover all the happenings of the night of the murder, to see if thereby all could be fitted into one chain. To this end, I questioned discreetly the servants who were about, making of myself a spy, but with a good conscience, and a lively interest in the affair for itself.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *The Mystery*

**W**HEN the thanes were gone, I set myself to go over all the events of the night, of which the sounds had reached me before I slept. I was able to mark these more closely, by questions put to the servants who had been about.

By this means, I was able to make an account of the hours until two of the morning, or near that time. After the feast, the king retired to his chamber with Banquo and Fleance to attend him. These, therefore, were last to see him in life before the murderer. It was well after midnight when they left the king,<sup>1</sup> coming into the inner court by the stairway at the western end of the terrace. A torchbearer was with them, for the night was dark, with the moon gone down behind the walls. Going along the terrace they met with Macbeth, with whom also was a torchbearer. These servants say that Macbeth had some converse with Banquo, and this agrees with the voices that I heard as I lay awake. They say also that Banquo gave a jewel to Macbeth, which was to be a gift from the king to his hostess, to mark the king's favour and contentment. So by this account the king was shut up with his chamberlains, and all was well, if Banquo spoke truly. And could it be otherwise, should any one doubt it, when Fleance and a servant were with him?

<sup>1</sup> Act II, sc. i.

The chamberlains were of the king's own retinue,<sup>1</sup> and trusted men. The king's dignity required their attendance, more than the thought of any danger. And they were two, to ensure each other that they did not sleep upon their watch. No one could reach the king but by passing them.

It was from the servant who carried the torch for Macbeth that I learned that, after Banquo and Fleance had gone, he left Macbeth alone in the court. He was sent by Macbeth with a message to Lady Macbeth, that she should strike upon a bell when his drink was ready.<sup>2</sup> Did Macbeth thus scheme to be rid of his servant, that he might be alone, and rush to the murder of Duncan? Then I must suppose that he passed the guards, being the king's host, as if to bid the king good-night, and slew the king, and passed the guards again. So the murder would be done speedily. And here I remembered that Macbeth later slew the guards, which he would do if afraid of what they might tell.

Then did the guards lie until morning with the king dead, to be seen by them at any time, and the alarm given, and Macbeth known to have passed them? Was so rash a deed to be imagined?

And what of the stains of blood in the passage? Could he pass the guards with a dagger still dripping? Or take their own daggers from them, and smear them, and all the rest that was found?

I saw, too, that Macbeth's being in the court a while alone was making a wrong suspicion, since others might do

<sup>1</sup> 'His spongy officers'. Act. I, sc. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Act II, sc. i.

## THE MYSTERY

all these things who were indoors, and not observed by having any servant with them. And I remembered to have heard the bell struck, so that Macbeth's message to Lady Macbeth was in good faith, and not a way to be rid of his torchbearer.

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Here I saw that I had gone too fast, for why should I suppose that Banquo spoke the truth when he conversed with Macbeth? Should suspicion not fall first upon him who left the king's chamber last of all?

Then there was cunning in Banquo's words, when he gave a jewel to Macbeth, as a gift from the king, pretending that he left the king well.

But Banquo had with him Fleance and a torchbearer. Was it thus that any murderer would go about it? Did he send them outside the doors while he slew the king? Or slay the king, while they waited outside? What if the king had called out, and the guards awake?

And the stains of blood outside the doors, and the daggers laid?—It was all the same over again, and I must find some other way.

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Nor could I suppose that Macduff killed the king, when he went to him in the morning. For I was sure that the king had been dead for many hours, and the blood was hardened. Nor could such a deed have been done so quickly.

## THE MYSTERY

And the guards were awake, though distracted,<sup>1</sup> when Macbeth and Lennox found them only some moments after.

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Which way should I take, then? Should I consider all those who were in the castle, who might have any cause for such a crime, and trace their doings in the night, or when we met in the morning? Malcolm and Donalbain had fled. Macbeth had slain the guards. Lady Macbeth had swooned away. Ross, Angus, and Fleance had not answered the alarm. Macduff and Lennox had the southern entry closed upon them. But, when so many of their attendants had left the castle, I could not follow this way out. Rather, I would first take the signs of the crime itself and reason on how it could have been done. Then I could think how each was placed for doing it.

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It was certain that Macbeth killed the chamberlains in the morning, Lennox being with him. So that the mystery which was to be unravelled was of this sort. The king stabbed to death upon his bed; his guards found dazed and distracted in the morning, with their daggers unsheathed and bloody, and upon their pillows; their own faces marked with blood; their cups empty near them; the passage outside of their ante-room spotted with stains of blood for some distance on either side.

<sup>1</sup> Act II, sc. iii.

## THE MYSTERY

Now, first of all, was the murder so plain that no far-fetched reasons were needed? Did his chamberlains kill the king, as was at first received, for reasons which I need not try to imagine, but which arose out of some purposes of their own?

Then they had conspired together to do this murder. But if one had a mind for so foul a crime, how should the other also chance to be so disposed? And how should one disclose such a purpose to the other, placing himself at so dreadful a risk?

And, if they conspired, why should both strike at the king? Would not one watch, fearing discovery, while the other struck? It was a strange thing to find both daggers marked with blood.

And if, putting this aside, both of them had some grievance of such weight as to lead them to conspire, why should they kill the king in a strange castle, where escape was the less easy to arrange, when so many other ways were open to them to plan the murder at leisure, and make concealment so much the easier?

And if the drops of blood along the passage were from their daggers, when they sought to escape, why did they not put up their daggers after the murder? For escape would not be easier for men carrying bare daggers, should they be met by any one. But allowing they carried their daggers drawn, and found escape barred, why should they return to their ante-room, and lay their daggers open and blood-stained beside them, and sleep till the morning?

So I could not receive the story that those of his chamber had wantonly murdered the king.

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Then, did they kill the king, being suborned to do it, as some thought?

I did not stop to ask by whom they were suborned, leaving this for the time aside. Was the murder of itself such as could so be accounted for?

But, since the king was to sleep only one night in Macbeth's castle, to suborn them must have been a quick resolve. And there were two chamberlains who must both be led so quickly into such a deed. And it must chance to be those two who were afterwards placed on guard. If either remained loyal, he would expose the plot, and the disloyalty of the other. When I thought upon the night of feasting, and how we were all assembled for rejoicing in the hall, I could not believe that the time sufficed, or the surroundings gave any likelihood, for such a plot to be hatched.

And, if suborned, they were surely promised escape or concealment. But there was neither. No, it was rather as if they proclaimed their crime, and that both had a part in it. The chamberlains were not such desperate men as this. Had they been betrayed by whoever had suborned them, would they not have concealed their part in the crime, and aroused the house with a tale of how they had been attacked?

I could not but think here of how Macbeth slew them.

## THE MYSTERY

More than any one else, he could promise them escape or concealment, in his own castle. Was he then taken unawares on finding that Macduff was to wait so early on the king, before he could make good his promise to the murderers? But again I was brought back to how they were found—the daggers drawn and bloodstained on their couches, and them but half asleep. Would murderers wait in this wise to be delivered by their accomplice? It was more like to be true, as Macbeth said, that he slew them in anger.

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Then, how next? If they were not suborned to kill the king with their own hands, were they suborned to allow some other person to enter the king's chamber for this purpose?

But, beyond what I have said, that two guards must be seduced from their allegiance, and that the risk of being exposed as a traitor was so great, if both did not agree with the murderer, it was more difficult than before to fit this with the way the murder was done. For it was the guards' own daggers that were bloody, and their faces also. Did some other murderer, having bribed the guards, then borrow their daggers from them, and not use his own? Were two daggers needed to kill the king? Did he restore their daggers to them stained with blood, and did they lay them out unwiped? All this was being too prodigal of blood and weapons, and blood upon weapons, and too reckless about concealment.

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I must try yet again. Were the guards suborned to allow it to appear that they had killed the king, having given to some other murderer a passage into the royal chamber?

This fitted with the way the daggers were found, and all the blood upon their faces. And also with there being stains of blood in the passage, which then would come from the dagger of the murderer as he fled, perchance changing his dagger from one hand to the other. But, still supposing that both of the grooms chanced to listen to such treachery, what reward could be promised to make them consent to this? The murderer to escape, the guards to face their certain doom in the morning!

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It was received at first that the guards had killed the king of their own design. After Malcolm and Donalbain had fled, it was received that they had suborned the guards; or it was pretended to be so received. But those who spoke thus had not seen with their own eyes what I had seen in the king's chamber, and beside it. There must be a better account, to show why the guards had not concealed the crime, or found some way of escape, if they were suborned; or raised an alarm, if they were not suborned.

There must be in this business something that was more deeply hidden. I must suppose the guards were loyal. Then there were but two ways of it; they were asleep, or somehow overcome. I must try to read the crime in this light.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *The Possets*

THE chamberlains were not guilty of the murder of the king, but were somehow overcome.

Then it was clear that they were not surprised by the murderer, or it might be more than one murderer. For then there must have been a conflict, and an alarm given, or the noise heard. True enough, it was a wild night, so that chimneys were blown down, and in the howling of the storm other noises might not be observed. But to surprise guards on their watch, and overcome them, could not be done without a clamour. True also, that I myself heard knocking more than once, about two of the clock, but this I was sure came from the south entry. Yet, if I supposed myself mistaken about the place, and that the noise echoed from the northern side of the court, could I suppose that, after a conflict with the guards, the murderers left them to their sleep? Then they would be accused in the morning, or an alarm given when they had fled from the place of the murder.

It was the same, if the murderers had seized the guards of a sudden, and smothered their voices. Murderers do not leave the witnesses of their crime to live to accuse them.

And there was no appearance of any conflict having taken place, and the chamberlains were not such as to have been easily overcome.

Then the chamberlains were overcome with sleep? This was coming nearer to a proper account of such a crime. I must suppose that they both slept, though on their watch, even although they were bound to ensure each other against this failure in their duty. Yet it might be that this happened, after such a night of feasting and carousal.

Now, had the king been left murdered, and the guards asleep, and no more, the drops of blood in the passage would show that the murderer, or more than one, fled in haste after the deed, not putting up their daggers at once. And this too was likely enough, after such a crime, which might well affright those who had done it. And so every one would have received it, but for the daggers which lay beside the chamberlains.

And so I, too, would have accounted for it, supposing only that the murderer, to cover up their own crime, had drawn the daggers of the chamberlains, and smeared them with blood, and the faces of the chamberlains also. And blood had been smeared from the king's wounds, as I had seen. I must suppose a murderer, or murderers, who sought an opportunity, and chanced to find it when the guards slept.. Yet this, as I say, he might hope for, after a night of feasting and drinking. He was some enemy of the king, who found an occasion to his hand to settle it in blood.

There I had almost resolved to leave it, and to cast about for the murderer himself. But when I came closer to it, it was not so easy. The murderer is affrighted by his crime, so that he flees with his dagger still dripping. I must

## THE POSSETS

suppose this, because of the bloodstains in the passage. He must have rushed quickly from the deed; this I held for certain. But no such stains as I found could have fallen from his own dagger, had he stayed to draw the daggers of the guards, and smear them, and the guards' faces, with blood; for his own dagger must then have been put up, and the blood on it hardened.

Yet he might have rushed from the deed, and bethought him as he went of how he might put it upon the guards, by smearing their daggers. Here was a reason why the bloodstains in the passage should be on both sides, if he turned back with his own dagger still dripping. This looked to be near the truth, till I thought again.

For a guard may sleep on his watch, but will he sleep so deeply as not to feel his weapon drawn? Or, if it is drawn, so as not to feel his face smeared with blood? A murderer, such as I was supposing, would move stealthily, deal his blow quickly, and flee before the guards could waken. He was in too great danger to give thought to such a dressing up of the scene, even if he supposed the guards drunken, and not merely sleeping. And there were two guards; his danger was twofold, for either might waken. Making myself, for the moment, into the murderer, I could think of but one thing, flight.

There must be more supposed than that the guards were sleeping; more even than that the murderer might think them drunken. This word turned my thoughts to their cups. After going on their watch, they had been given

possets, which they had drained. Here was, as it were, the starting of a new hare from the tangled covert of my thoughts. If the possets of the guards were drugged, and the murderer knew of this, he would feel himself safe to dress the crime up, and put it upon the chamberlains. Was this, at last, the way in which the king had been killed? It was no mere conjecture, but the account of the crime to which the signs pointed, when everything was sifted out.

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Now, if this was the way of it, let me again make myself into the murderer, and trace my own acts in order. The chamberlains have been drugged; at what time, or how, let me consider afterwards. But the murderer knows they are drugged, and that the way to the king's chamber is safe for him.

Then the king is killed, and the murderer goes about making the crime seem to be that of the guards. He smears the king's blood on their faces, and on their daggers. He need not fear their waking, even if he must draw their daggers. The deed is done, and in the morning the guards will be accused.

But here again I am checked. For if this was the way it was done, how was the passage marked with the stains of blood? The murderer had no need for haste; he had made time to commit the murder as he willed, and to arrange everything at his ease. But the stains of blood in the passage were the signs of hasty flight, with a weapon still unsheathed. It was still a riddle that I had to read.

## THE POSSETS

If the murderer feared the awaking of the guards, he would fly after the deed, and so bloodstains in the passage would be accounted for. If he did not fear their awaking, he could draw their daggers, and lay out everything as it was found inside the chamber. But how should there be both of these at once—the signs of flight, as well as the signs of the leisurely arranging of the guilt of the chamberlains?

What was found outside the king's chamber denied what was found within it. How should the murderer, having the guards drugged, and time easy on his hand, carry any daggers outside the chamber at all, and not arrange everything within it before he went forth, with the deed done?

Let me think again. I was sure that the guards were drugged. The murderer was safe against their awaking. But he was not safe against the awaking of others, so he might still be affrighted by anything he imagined or heard. It was such a crime as well might affright the doer of it when it was newly done, and dispose him in the instant to flight. Then he might rally himself, and return to place the daggers as they were found.

Or there might be some sound which he heard, which made him fear discovery. And he might flee from the chamber, till assured that all was quiet. Now such sounds I myself heard, for there was knocking many times repeated. And the falling of masonry, which also happened, might make him fear that the house would be aroused.

Then the best account that could be made, so as to

include all the signs of the crime, was after this manner. The murderer had made sure that the chamberlains were drugged. Then he slew the king with his own dagger, and rushed from the chamber, with his weapon reeking in his hand. So there would be stains of blood in the passage as he went, on one hand. But he took courage again, and went back to arrange the seeming guilt of the chamberlains. So there were stains of blood on the other hand also, from his own dagger, as he went back. Then he smeared the king's blood on the faces and weapons of the grooms, and laid the weapons bare, and so Macduff found it all in the morning. Or it might be that he used the guards' own daggers to kill the king, and was so affrighted after the deed that he rushed out with both still dripping, one in either hand.

Now it fitted best with my reasoning that he used the guards' own daggers. For if they were overcome by some drug, the murder was no quick impulse, but a plan made beforehand, having the seeming guilt of the guards as a part of it. Then he had no need of one weapon more, namely his own dagger, when those of the guards were to be made bloody in any case. And I thought, as I saw the weapons in the morning, that they had been so used, and not only smeared as well. And this also would show why he used both of the guards' daggers, when one was enough, to put the guilt upon them both. But he was a frightened man either way, to have rushed out with his weapons, and gone back again.

So at length I had an account which, like a good vessel,

## THE POSSETS

was tight against leakage. And it turned upon the guards being overcome by some drug or potion. So I must ask myself how this could have been done, and who was most like to have been able to do it.

Here I was brought up by what Macbeth's servant had said—who was with him in the court when he spoke with Banquo—that Lady Macbeth was to prepare a drink for Macbeth in the night, and to strike upon a bell when it was ready. Now I remembered what I had heard in the night; how a bell had sounded about the time when the clock struck two. So a drink was prepared about that time, and by Lady Macbeth. And this was not long after Banquo had left the king, and had spoken with Macbeth on the terrace, so that Macbeth knew the king was gone to rest.

I feared to let my thoughts run on. But I must go to the end of this matter. For who could give a drink to the guards at such an hour but the master and mistress of the castle? It was not strange that either of them, but most likely their hostess, should do this courtesy to the king's chamberlains, and carry to them an evening posset. And, by the chance of Macbeth's message through his servant, I knew that a posset was prepared in Macbeth's apartments. Had I even not known of this, who else could I suppose to have drugged the cups and given them to the guards? That which made the murderer bold had made them drunk; what had quenched them had given him fire.

But though all this fitted, I still shrank from supposing it for certain. I must accuse Macbeth, and Lady Macbeth

with him, or—what else? The night might cover many doings which were off the track of my reasoning. Did the guards go off their watch, and carouse with the attendants—for there was carousal till the night was far spent? Had the darkness some secret of orgie and treachery which could not be pieced together? For this, my thoughts must leave room, and hold it against the dreadful suspicion of my thane, who had fought so bravely for the king.

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From the signs of the murder, as they were in the king's chamber and outside it, I turned to think of how each of the thanes could in other ways stand in regard to it.

Now, Lennox and Macduff were shut in in the disused apartments. It needed much knocking, before the porter could release them in the morning. I thought that these two were clear of any suspicion.

Malcolm and Donalbain had fled when the murder was made known. Now Donalbain slept alone in the second chamber, and Malcolm was lodged with Banquo. If both had fled, it was for a cause felt by them both. I could not believe that they conspired to kill their father; or that Malcolm stole unobserved from the chamber where he was lodged with Banquo, or that Donalbain alone could arrange such a crime. It was more like that they fled through fear, finding treachery against their house in the castle of the Morays.

## THE POSSETS

Banquo was lodged with Malcolm. Could he steal forth and return without it being observed?

Of Ross, Angus, and Fleance, I have said that they did not meet the rest of us when the alarm bell was rung. But they were lodged farther off. And had it been guilt which kept them, it must have been all three, and I could not suppose such a chance as this.

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So that again I was tied down to Macbeth, and Lady Macbeth, by both ways of looking at it. And, of there being a cause of dispute between Moray and Atholl, I have already spoken. But against such suspicion, of so foul a deed, I still chose to hold the chance of some mystery which was the secret of the night.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *The Weird Sisters*

THE time passed. Macbeth was set on the throne, and I remained at the Court in the favour of the king and queen. Of the murder of Duncan men had almost ceased to speak. There were reports of how Malcolm stayed at the English Court and conspired against Macbeth, and that Donalbain was with rebels in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> By their flight they were still accused, though none could offer any reason for the crime of parricide, or even for the flight, or for plotting in England to gain a crown which was already Malcolm's, had he stayed to claim it. Those who were of the Atholls were silent, as if allowing the default of their house, and shamed by the crime. But among the thanes it seemed as if doubts grew as the time went on, and the sons of Duncan, by their very absence from their home and heritage, seemed to point a finger of suspicion at the castle of Inverness from which they had fled. But I kept my own counsel as to how the murder could have been done and how it could not have been, allowing it to be supposed that the guards whom Macbeth killed had the secret of their own or some other's crime.

However it might seem to the common folk, or be the concern of the thanes as to their loyalty to Macbeth, to me it was no question of a king and a crown, or this house and

<sup>1</sup> Act III, sc. i.

## THE WEIRD SISTERS

that, but as it were some riddle given me to read for its own sake. It was in this wise, and the more so for being a physician, that I often returned to the thoughts of the night and morning at Inverness. I have spoken of the portents which had gone abroad among the people, but they accused no one, even if I should attend to them. And there was after the murder that which was like the portent before, namely signs to read as it were backward. Macbeth and his queen bore their new state well,<sup>1</sup> so that every month in their Court, when I saw them closely and received many marks of confidence and favour, disposed me more and more to a hearty loyalty and the casting away of suspicions. So if I came back to the events of that night, I could look for a key to the mystery with a cool mind, as if it were some murder in a smith's bothy, and not a king in a castle.

It was Banquo who led me, when in this state of mind, to think again of the weird sisters. The prophecies they had made to himself and Macbeth seemed to weigh on his mind.<sup>2</sup> He had seen them come true for Macbeth, all that the weird sisters promised, though there were two between Macbeth and the crown, Duncan and Malcolm. Did he brood on how they should come true for him, though he stood in no near line of succession, even if Macbeth's line should fail, and Duncan's had forfeited their claim? It was by murder that Macbeth had, by chance or purpose, succeeded to the throne; how then should Banquo's line succeed? Were these the fearful thoughts that he sought to restrain in him-

<sup>1</sup> So the histories say.

<sup>2</sup> Act II, sc. i, and Act III, sc. i, init.

self? Yet I thought him one who would keep his allegiance clear against murder or treason. My belief is now that it was the disturbed thoughts and questionings, which at times he showed me in private speech, that lured him to his death. But of this later. It is of my own visit to the witches that I have here to speak. But it was through Banquo's concern about them that I was made curious whether they would pretend to tell secrets to me also, and if they would pretend to read me a riddle of the past, as well as foretell the future.

I have said already how the so-called witches were known among the common folk, but no more than as old women who carried on their rites for alms or mischief, though none could remember them when young. Of themselves they spoke only as sisters, as the weird sisters, fearing the name of witch, and uttering threats and curses on any who so named them;<sup>1</sup> and this because any who pretended to a power of true witchery over others stood in danger of death by burning or drowning. Yet if they pretended only to spells and charms, or even to prophecies, there were many who resorted to them, in a sort of half belief, and called them witches, but not so as to accuse them of occult powers. It is easy thus to resort to any who tell us with strange rites that which we are disposed to believe, and so they were visited by many, not of the common folk only. So I think, though left wondering at the end over what I saw with my own eyes.

It was at Forres that, seeing Banquo still to be in much concern over their prophecies, I resolved to seek out their

<sup>1</sup> Act I, sc. iii.: the witch curses the woman who calls her by this name.

## THE WEIRD SISTERS

cave for myself. It was no small journey from the palace, for I set out after noon, and had borrowed some hours of the night ere I returned. More often than once, I had chided Banquo about his concern over their prophecies to Macbeth and himself, and sought to show him how there was no prophecy when they called Macbeth thane of Cawdor (it being already known to many), and to call Macbeth king hereafter was easy guessing at that time. Yet, having chided Banquo, here was I myself now asking of passers-by the way to the witches. Some laughed, and some would have told my fortune themselves, and some turned away as if it were evil to speak of them. It was no easy business to find the way, and dusk was falling on the heath. The heath was wild with gorse and bracken, and with withered stumps of trees, as if at some time blasted with lightning. I came at length upon a place where the earth was charred with the blackened embers of a fire, and a tripod of stout branches joined together lay upon the ground close by, with a crooked arm of wood fixed in the centre by pleated osiers and lighter branches. As I made sure that here must be the scene of the fire dancings and other orgies of which there was a common report, and of the boiling cauldron in whose smoke they pretended to read the future, I raised the tripod and struck the hard ground with its feet, to place it upright. I had scarce done this when from near at hand a scrannel voice came with the words

*Open locks,  
Whoever knocks,*

and I heard low mutterings of harsh laughter. I looked around, but could see no place where any person could be hid. Then before me, at some ten paces, the brushwood opened, and the hags came in view, crouching and leaning on strangely twisted sticks. They were so withered as to seem scarcely to have bodies; their attire was earth-stained rags which made no garments that were of a piece, but were thrown about them with no fastenings to show how they were held, and blew in tatters on their limbs and shoulders. Their hair was matted and filthy, and fell over their faces, so that they peered through it. As they stood before me, showing toothless gums, and almost fleshless arms, I scarcely believed them to be inhabitants of the earth, till I rallied my thoughts to the aid of my eyes, and looked on them without fear. They did not stretch out their hands for alms, but each laid a finger on her lips, as if to ask me to speak low, or as if to bespeak mystery in what they might say.

But they did not speak. In an instant, only one stood crouching before me; the others vanished as if the earth had swallowed them. I saw that the dry brushwood hid the entrance of their cave, into which they had quickly glided. That one which remained fell on her hands and knees, and blew the charred embers into a glow, on which she threw dry sticks and rushes, till in a moment the flames crackled. From the cav~~o~~ the others bore a steaming pot, and the crouching women together helped to raise it, and place it on the crook of wood over the fire. Their seeming weakness

## THE WEIRD SISTERS

was gone; they clapped their hands, and danced around it, first one way, then the other, chanting strange rhymes in their high voices. The odour of their pot, now borne on the wind, was foul, as if horrible things were cooked in it.

As I made to speak to them, one crept toward me, and raising one hand, cried, ‘Light is dark’—and another, ‘and dark is light’; then all three together—‘Night is day, and day is night.’ And then, moving again round the cauldron, they chanted this refrain, which made my blood freeze in horror:

*Light is dark, and dark is light,  
Night is day, and day is night,  
Deed of blood, and daggers twain,  
Sleep the guards, the king is slain.  
Poisoned cup, and dripping blade,  
Fearful eye, and stealthy tread.  
Cats in darkness, sisters three,  
Read the face that turns to flee.*

I bade them to pause, and show me their meaning. ‘Who are ye’, I asked, ‘that ye should know of the manner of the king’s death? But if ye know, then read me the face that hath the fearful eye, if ye can indeed see it in the darkness. For I have spied on this deed, but only by the signs of the daylight.’

Harsh laughter met my question, and as it were in mockery of my spying they answered me:

FIRST WITCH: Hail!

SECOND WITCH: Hail!

THIRD WITCH: Hail!

FIRST WITCH: I'll give thee a sign.

SECOND WITCH: And I another.

THIRD WITCH: Thou thyself hast all the other.

There was no sign, except that the reek of the cauldron became thicker, and curled upwards in fantastical ways, stinging the eyes and choking the throat; or did I suppose that I saw for a moment the form of a smoke-drawn dagger, and then a clutching hand, and the face of Macbeth? Was it thus that they practised their art, dazing the senses until in a stupor vision took on the shapes of inmost thought? Before I could rally myself, they chanted together:

*Hail to him who seeks to know  
Whose the hand that dealt the blow.  
He shall creep and crawl and peer,  
Trace the blood upon the bier,  
Test the blade and nose the drink,  
Day and night shall think and think,  
Every doing note and heed,  
For the secret of the deed.*

FIRST WITCH: Cats in darkness—

SECOND WITCH: Sisters three—

THIRD WITCH: Midnight eyes shall lend to thee!

Then, while I waited to know what their sign might be, not trusting my voice or senses, the sisters seemed to become weary of a sudden; they muttered to each other of their toil and trouble, and I caught stray words about their dam

## THE WEIRD SISTERS

Hecate, and paddocks, and greymalkin, as if their rites were to do with themselves alone, and not with me, like some grief or penance that weighed upon them. They crouched and crooned and mumbled, like children chidden for some fault or misdeed, while they raked the ashes with sticks, and threw in the pot things that seemed to quench the smoke. I saw no more appearances of things, and would have spoken, when they hailed me again. They quickly put aside their torpor, and in the clearness their eyes seemed to burn with a livid light, 'while they pointed crooked fingers toward me.

FIRST WITCH: All Hail! would'st prove Glamis?

SECOND WITCH: All Hail! would'st prove Cawdor?

THIRD WITCH: All Hail! that shalt have proof hereafter!

ALL: Prove the deed? would'st not fail?

Waking sleep shall tell the tale!

Here then was such a sign as they had said they would give me. But I know this only now, when I look back on my meeting with the sisters. For at the time, what more could I suppose than that it was the very stupor of my senses in the infected smoke of the cauldron that was meant by this waking sleep, when I thought I had seen all that I have described. And indeed, I can easily suppose that others who sought the aid of the weird sisters, when their minds were unquiet with either hope or dread, would be prone to see their hopes or fears give shape to the dense and twisting vapours which at the same time confused their senses. Thus, their own thoughts being matched, they

## THE WEIRD SISTERS

would believe the witches to have more than natural powers to read what was secret. So it may have been with Macbeth, and Banquo also. But I was to know more of this sign of the waking sleep, and of the ways in which it was to be read.

Next, if such creatures could be said to dance, the sisters circled round their pot, three times to each motion, and marked their dance to each other thus:

*Thrice to mine, and thrice to thine,  
And thrice again to make up nine,*

and then stood motionless, as if wound up to cast some spell or make some far prophecy, and so spoke:

FIRST WITCH: Show him! show him!

SECOND WITCH: Evil deeds to watch and mark,  
Through the blanket of the dark.

THIRD WITCH: Whose the feet that walks so late?  
    *paid* Fails the feast to tempt his fate?  
    *be* Flees the son, the father dead,  
    *his* This the riddle to be read.

And then again their strength seemed to fail them. Their limbs loosened, they crouched on their sticks, and as if again heedless of my presence, they moaned in low tones:

*Double, double, toil and trouble,  
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.*

In the failing light of the evening they stole away from me into the brush that hid their cave, and I was left alone.

Weird sisters, indeed, and leaving my mind in a turmoil.

## THE WEIRD SISTERS

Should I still accuse Macbeth, because of such spells and such utterances? Yet they had seemed to speak truly of things which I knew, and which would scarcely have reached them by common report. For Macbeth had failed the feast at Inverness, as I have shown, when Duncan was murdered. And the sons of Duncan had fled. Whose then, save Macbeth's, were the feet that walked so late on that night?

What had it profited me to visit the witches, if my suspicions of the king, long laid to a sort of rest by his bearing of his new dignity, were to be awakened by such weird sayings? I rated myself that I had lent them my ear. But as I went from the place, and turned back to look at where the embers still smoked, I could fancy that the wind carried a mocking echo:

*Wou'd sa<sup>th</sup> not fail?*  
*Waking sleep shall tell the t<sub>n</sub> I 'l*

I little thought how strangely this <sup>th</sup>s to come about.

at

## CHAPTER NINE

### *Banquo rides forth*

*Banquo*  
**T**HREE are many events which I must pass over, for my tale is to be one only of those scenes which my memory can link together into a chain which joins the murder of Duncan to the proof of the crime.

The visit which I had made to the witches bore no fruit for a long while, and their words were fading from my mind in all but rhyme and measure, on which there was no meaning thrown by anything that happened. When the queen's gentlewoman told me of how the malady had appeared in a new way, so that she was more troubled than before in her sleep, and that it was an accustomed action with her to rise from her bed and go about with open eyes, but in a dream, I paid but little heed at the time. And this I think was because it was not toward the queen, but toward Macbeth and Banquo, that I looked for signs and conduct that might be read by the light of the witches' sayings. But the gentlewoman herself barred me from knowing all that I might then have learned, for she quickly covered up her words, when she had said how the queen spoke aloud in her dream, as if to forestall any question about what sort of words the queen uttered. So I was to miss the sign of waking sleep, when I might have seen it, and then I was to have a false appearance of it, before I was to read it truly, as if the sisters had set their

## BANQUO RIDES FORTH

prophecies in the form of a trick or a game that they played against me.

Now I must show how it is that I believe Banquo to have been led by the influence of the weird sisters to a fatal journey. The day stands out clear in my mind, and is the beginning of other events in my tale, so I shall relate what took place at Forres, when a council of state had called the leading thanes to the palace.

There were still reports from England such as to cause disquiet. It was said that great forces were being prepared to march in support of Malcolm, who openly accused Macbeth of the murder of Duncan. It was whispered, too, that some of the thanes were wavering whether to cast in their lot with him, most of all Macduff, who kept himself in his castle in Fife, and was absent from the king's councils and his dutiful attendance. No peace ~~w~~ <sup>t</sup> yet made with Norway, whose strongholds in the north were the source of unceasing raids. And there was ~~ancient~~<sup>acute</sup> anxiety, for the ~~tanist~~ had not yet been named, and time could scarcely be longer delayed. The son of the queen, Lulac, was last of the line of Duff, and carried also the claims of the Morays through the queen's earlier marriage to the head of that house; and the alternate line was in default by the treason of Malcolm and Donalbain. There was no male heir of undoubted claims, and even Thorfinn the Norseman might claim through his mother, the youngest of the daughters of Malcolm the Second,<sup>1</sup> so that he was full cousin of

<sup>1</sup> See the chart, p. 6.

Duncan. This was a perilous condition of things, and the king had summoned a great council to Forres, where a banquet of state was to mark the occasion.

I come to the day which preceded the feast. Lennox, Ross, and Angus were at the palace. Macduff was looked for, as the king's bidding had gone forth. Banquo, with his son Fleance, had reached Forres in the morning, in time for the council, which was fixed for the afternoon.<sup>1</sup>

I was with the king when he greeted Banquo with great favour as his chief guest; and indeed his exploits in the field, as well as his counsel, had placed Banquo high in the affairs of the kingdom. The king gave him the command for the solemn supper of the evening, requiring his presence. But then, seeing that Banquo was attired for riding, he asked if he rode forth that afternoon, as if to remind him of the council. Now Banquo w<sup>o</sup> not only prepared for riding out, but was also impatient to be off, in a manner almost too plain for courtesy. The king<sup>1</sup> intimated his displeasure, saying he would else have sought his presence in that day's council, but turned it quickly, letting the council wait till the morning, but charging him not to fail the feast. It was more than was due to even the chief counsellor to have the council wait for him, but the king's displeasure passed quickly, and he was more than gracious in commanding Banquo and Fleance to their horses' backs. The council would wait; till seven o'clock let each be master of his time.

Now it was from Forres that I myself rode out to see the

<sup>1</sup> Act III, sc. i, deals with these events.

## BANQUO RIDES FORTH

witches. And I could not but observe the impatience of Banquo to set out, and how he answered the king with more direct speech than was becoming, saying that night might fall before he returned, and that his time called upon him. Now why was this? What was the purpose on which he was so set—for it was plainly some set purpose, and no mere going about to pass the time. Not his speech, but his manner also, showed it. I had the answer, as if he had spoken it. He must see the witches. This was the meaning of his concern and haste. I read his purpose out of my own, though for me it was only a matter of a curious mind, but it touched him more nearly. And more than once he had betrayed the unrest which the first meeting with the sisters had placed him under, in the degree of nearly an affliction. It may be that he rated himself, as I had done, for yielding to any belief that they could tell him ~~the~~ future, but try them he must. How should his heirs ~~be~~ kings, and ~~not~~ himself? Who should make Fleance ~~the~~ Stanist, not being near in blood to Atholl or Moray, and by what unforeseen outcome of events?

I thought I saw his purpose for sure. He was for the ~~weird~~ sisters. He would take Fleance with him, in the hope that the sisters would prophesy for them both. That he had spoken of these matters to Fleance, I could hardly doubt. It might be that it was Fleance himself who urged Banquo to make the journey. Would he easily forbear from seeing and hearing for himself?

Banquo and Fleance rode out from the palace. By the



London -

Banquo rides out

## BANQUO RIDES FORTH

gate, as they went, were two men seeking speech with the king. I liked not their looks, nor was the king likely to give audience to such. But I saw their garb, which I thought was the garb of Lochaber. Now it was in Lochaber that the rebellion had ~~taken~~ place when Banquo was leader there, and there was some grievance over how he had borne upon them in the matter of the revenues which he gathered for the king. I was to remember this later, when I put together all the events of this night, and my idle regard of these men as they waited came to be of more account.

Did I guess right? Did the sisters read the future to Banquo and Fleance when they rode out? If they so read them the page of their destiny, it was for Banquo a brief one.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare clearly intends that the physician's guess was right, and that Banquo went to see the witches. In Act III, scene i, Banquo is already attired for riding when he meets Macbeth. Otherwise there is no explanation of Macbeth's question, 'ride you this afternoons?' And Banquo's soliloquy is as follows:

*Thou hast it now: king, Cawdor, et  
As the weird sisters p'omised, and, all,  
Thou play'dst most foully for't; yet it was said  
It should not stand in thy posterity,  
But that myself should be the root and father  
Of many kings. If there come truth from them—  
As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine—  
Why, by the verities on thee made good,  
May they not be my oracles as well,  
And set me up in hope?*

These words are on his lips as he rides forth, impatient to be gone.

## CHAPTER TEN

### *The False Prophecy*

**W**HEN the hour for the banquet had arrived, Banquo and Fleance had not returned to the palace. As the banquet was one of state, which all were enjoined not to fail, to have missed the hour appointed was no small fault, unless some mischance had befallen them. That the king showed no concern regarding their absence, as we entered the room of state, I took at the time for leniency, greater than suited the occasion.

Macduff had not yet reached the castle.<sup>1</sup> But his journey was from Fife, and night might overtake him, and it was enough that he should answer the king's bidding to the council, which, it may be, the king had the more readily delayed till the morrow that he might arrive.

Now I must strive, recall the strange events which took place on this night, and caused the banquet to be broken up. It was the recent words of the witches which made them strike on my mind with so much greater force than if I had been only an onlooker on events of the moment. Then I would have seen only some illness of the king; and it would have passed from my mind. But the weird sisters had said how a waking sleep ~~was to tell me the tale~~; and what else was the tale but the murder of Duncan? On that very night the prophecy was to seem to come true, for the king was to

<sup>1</sup> Act III, sc. iv. 'Macduff denies his person at our great bidding.'

## THE FALSE PROPHECY

be afflicted with what I could not but take to be such a waking sleep as they foretold. Nay more, in such a sleep the king was to show himself clear of guilt, and the prophecy was so to seem fulfilled as to be a mockery of my purpose to know the truth about the murder. To the others it would pass as only some malady of the imagination of a king distraught by reproaches that the crown should have come to him by the foul deed of some unknown hand. But I must perforce see in it a deeper meaning. And it was thus that my going to the witches made me read (as I now know) wrongly, as if they played some game of deception with me.

The banquet was laid in the hall of the palace. The queen kept her place of state, but the king, having given a hearty welcome, and invited the lords to sit, left his high seat, as if to come to the table and mix with less ceremony with his guests.<sup>1</sup> A seat was placed for him in the midst of the lords and attendants, and he moved to go thereto when a messenger stood within the door, as if bearing news of importance. It might well be to give the excuse of Banquo's delay through some failure of his horse, or news of Macduff. Yet it was strange to see the feast delayed while the king conversed with him, so that the queen, being impatient of this, rallied the king on the want of ceremony. I supposed the messenger to come from Banquo, when the king, coming toward the table, graciously spoke of his absence, whether from blame or mischance. But how he came from

<sup>1</sup> Act III, sc. iv.

Banquo, I was not then to guess, but only now, when I look back over all these happenings.

As the king moved to the place set for him, he stopped of a sudden, as if overcome with a stupor, his eyes fixed, and, gazing toward the place kept for him, he spoke words without meaning, asking 'Which of you have done this?', and again, 'Thou canst not say I did it.' We looked with a question at each other, to know what was done, which the king had not done, but reproached us for doing. His seat was in the midst, as he had himself commanded; it was his very wish to have this, and not the chair of state. Naught had been done in lessening of his dignity, except by his own gracious permission. We were astonished and disturbed, and would have risen from our seats, but that the queen required us to keep seated, saying that from youth the king was often so affl. <sup>trid</sup> with imaginings, and that the fit would pass, if we would <sup>but</sup> disregard it, and not by showing concern increase it. <sup>we</sup> were moved to the king, and spoke with him what we could <sup>not</sup> hear, and restored him soon, till he went to his place, seeming himself again, and calling us to drink a measure round to all <sup>ourselves</sup>, and to Banquo, whom we still missed; and, with our duty, we drank the pledge.

So it might have passed with others, but to see the king in this kind of <sup>waking</sup> sleep, with these words still fresh in my mind, was a check to my thoughts, for what tale was told by the king's words when he said—'Thou canst not say I did it.' But no time was given me to think further,

## THE FALSE PROPHECY

for the king, as we still raised our cups to drink the pledge, was seized as if with a madness of horror, and, holding his hand before his face, exclaimed 'Avaunt, and quit my sight; let the earth hide thee! Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold!' The thanedom of Scotland looked with amazement on the ravings of their king. The queen, much distraught, still sought to give it the appearance of a customary malady, while the king, as if seeing none who were present, but things unseen to our eyes, and as if possessed by some demon of fear, or hatred, or we knew not what, spoke defiance to such creatures of his distorted vision as the Russian bear, the armed rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger. Nay more, returning again to his natural speech, he chided us that we should see such sights and not blench with fear. There was no more thought of the banquet, or our royal homage. The majesty of Scotland could command only our pity. We stood not on the order of our going, but went forth, praying better health for his malady.

But there it could not rest for me. Here was waking sleep to tell the tale, as the weird sisters had said. And what tale? In my chamber, I put together, side by side, the prophecy and the king's frenzy. 'Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold.' 'Thou canst not say I did it.' Of whom was the vision, but of Duncan? In Macbeth's own castle he had been done to death. Was the king's conscience haunted by the spectre of Duncan, as his wrath had been inflamed to kill the guards? Had he indeed such a malady of the mind as to brood so deeply on the injury to his

honour, or the suspicion of his loyalty, with Duncan murdered in his own house? I could not but suppose this. So Macbeth's words, 'Thou canst not say I did it', showed that his was not the hand of the murderer. In waking sleep we speak our thoughts without disguise. The king reproached himself, but made himself clear of accusation. So the weird sisters were in part true prophets of how the tale should be told. But they told me only, if such prophecy should be attended to, that I spied wrongly on Macbeth.

So at the moment it seemed. When things come close together, and fit each other, even if one be the prophecy of witches, who is strong enough to keep his resolve against believing in any foreknowledge? Had not the witches told me that 'waking sleep would tell the tale', it was yet possible for me to have guessed that the king's madness came out of Duncan's murder, and to have vouched that Macbeth was not privy to it. But the weird sisters had disposed my mind to see it more rearward. So I was confirmed in my second thoughts, as I have set out before, because of the mystery of the stains of dripped blood, that Duncan was killed by some hand and some means which was the secret of the night, and its manifold opportunities.

Because of the frenzy of the king, and the way in which it suited the prophecy of the witches concerning the waking sleep, I gave no thought that night to how they had spoken of one that had failed the feast. For I took this at the time to mean the feast at Inverness, which Macbeth had failed, and the greater concern of the king's distraction barred it

## THE FAALSE PROPHECY

for th my notice that Banquo also was one who failed in this waunner. All the rest that the witches had said, and that as h·n a dream I fancied I saw in their fumes, was put away by this one thing, that Macbeth protested that his was not the hand, seeming to utter the deep truth of his conscience.

Yet the tale was not told, if some other hand had killed Duncan. I fell asleep in a tangle of doubt and confusion, and the witches danced in my dreams.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *The Second Murder*

**W**HEN we met on the next morning, and all was being prepared for the great council, Macduff had not yet arrived at the castle, nor had any messenger come from him to excuse his delay. Now the council had first been fixed for the afternoon before the banquet, as I have said, so it was no ordinary delay that he should still be waited for, and it was plain that it displeased the king. So a messenger was sent to him with a special command.<sup>1</sup>

But it was even more strange that Banquo and Fleance were still absent. What could this portend? Not, as might be thought of Macduff, that they wavered in their duty, and kept away from the council which was to consult about the designs of Malcolm and Donalbain, and the strange inventions which they were said to utter about the king; for then they would not have come to the palace as they had done the day before. Yet no message had come from them either, and the council waited.

We were soon to know. There was other treachery against the king, nearer than in England, which had struck at the life of his most brave and skilful general. Banquo had been cruelly murdered. His body was found in a ditch, about a mile<sup>2</sup> from the palace, gashed with a score of wounds. We feared the same fate for Fleance, though his body had

<sup>1</sup> Act III, sc. iv, *fin.*

<sup>2</sup> Act III, sc. iii. 2.

## THE SECOND MURDER

not yet been found. For, had he escaped, he would surely have reached the palace to tell of his father's murder and spread the alarm.

The place of the murder was close to where it was customary for those who rode out to leave their horses, and make for the palace on foot by a shorter way. Here also, after nightfall, they would call for a torch.<sup>1</sup> And it seemed that, knowing of this, the murderers had waylaid Banquo and Fleance near to where they had dismounted. I say the murderers, for one murderer alone could not so have waylaid two men, and one of them Banquo. Nay more, three would be required to make sure of such a deed.

But as the day passed, and the body of Fleance was not found, the matter took on a more ugly look, though we shrank from believing it could be true. If Fleance was not killed beside his father, then he had fled; for otherwise he must have come to the palace. Here then was another parricide, and Banquo's fate the same as Duncan's. This was too strange; there seemed to be something hidden and fearsome, more fearsome than one parricide upon another, yet made to wear the guise o' this unnatural deed.

But how else could it have come about? That Fleance had indeed escaped, and not been murdered where he was not yet found, was more certain because of the way Banquo's body was gashed. For this showed that the murderers had attended to him only, wreaking their vengeance in useless blows when he was already dead and his throat cut across,

<sup>1</sup> Act III, sc. iii.

## THE SECOND MURDER

as they would not have done had they had another to attend to. Yet, if escaped, for what reason should he flee like a guilty person?

It was received, or pretended to be received, that Fleance had killed Banquo, and the king and thanes went into the council. But I imagined, as I watched their faces and bearing as they went, that there were some—and most of all Lennox<sup>1</sup>—who had other thoughts. The banquet, the ravings of the king, the murder of Banquo, and the flight of Fleance, made a confused business of which each part made a question of the rest, and a dark doubt over it all.

Now I held it for certain that Malcolm and Donalbain did not kill Duncan; it was not to be believed for itself, or by the signs of that murder. And Fleance, pretend what might be pretended, did not kill Banquo. What need had he, if any design so terrible was in his mind, to go riding with Banquo to do it, and to cast the guilt on himself by flight? And to slay him, not in some remote place where the crime could be hidden, but in a place well marked and known?

Was I to suppose that they rode to the witches' cave, and that some prophecy they received, such as had been given before to Banquo, that his issue would be kings, made some quarrel between them about I know not what, so that some hasty blow was struck, and the deed repented too late? No, a score of gashes is not the mark of a parricide, or of a sudden quarrel.

<sup>1</sup> Act III, sc. vi.

## THE SECOND MURDER

But two things remained to be answered. Who were the murderers, for there were two or three at least, and for what cause, and how aware of the opportunity? And wherefore the flight of Fleance, with safety at hand in the palace?

I must suppose that Fleance, seeing Banquo killed, felt no safety in escaping to the palace. Then it must be that the faces of the murderers were known to him, and that he feared them in this place, and so made his escape out of their way. But who could such men be in the king's palace? It was true that Banquo had enemies against him among the men of Lochaber, for the revolt had arisen there which the Macdonwald led because of some supposed oppression in raising the tribute which was due, and which Banquo was to gather for the king. But would any such enemies be in the palace of Macbeth, whose own hand had slain the Macdonwald and put down the revolt?

But then, of a sudden, I recalled how, when Banquo and Fleance were setting out, there were two men seeking speech with the king, and how I liked not their looks. Now these men would be seen by Banquo and Fleance, or so I might suppose, to show a reason why Fleance should feel no safety in escaping to the palace. There were no others whom Fleance might have seen at the murder of Banquo and whom he might fear to meet if he returned; or none that I could think on in this way. For, as I turned it over in every light, it was something beyond ordinary belief that he should not have returned to us with his father slain close at hand,

and it was like a finger pointing at some one amongst us whom he accused by his flight. Who then were these men who sought speech with the king?

From the attendant who brought them to the king I learned that they had speech with Macbeth for no little time, and that it seemed as if they came at his summons. Nay more, that their garb was like that of Lochaber rather than of these parts, as I myself had thought at the time. So they might well be enemies of Banquo, but how received by Macbeth? It was passing strange to have all these things together, the king in counsel with such men, and his distraction at the feast, and Banquo murdered in such a way that Fleance chose flight from among us. And if many strange things happen together, should they not be read together, and if one of them be foul murder, must not the rest be likely to have to do with it?

Then I thought of how, at the banquet, the king had spoken to a messenger at the door, before his distraction came upon him. Now there was no attendant who gave this man admission, but a servant who saw him closely said that there was blood upon his face, as if he had come quickly from some encounter. Whence such a messenger? I scarcely now could mention to myself the suspicion of whence he came.

But now there was still more to come into the question. It passed our notice at the moment how Macbeth had made such gracious mention of Banquo, when he failed the feast. But how might this now appear, with Banquo murdered?

## THE SECOND MURDER

It was not once only, but twice,<sup>1</sup> and in a way that was more than ordinary, that the king excused the guest whom he had required not to fail. But from this feast there was missing not Banquo only, but also Macduff. And we knew that Banquo had come to the palace that day, so that his return from riding out was no matter for concern, being perhaps delayed for some small cause or other. But Macduff had not yet reached the palace on his hard journey from Fife. Wherefore then the king's so marked concern for Banquo, and none for Macduff? For at any moment Banquo might walk in among us, and why should we pledge him as one whom we missed?

When I saw all these things together in one frame, the suspicion darkened that the king pledged Banquo, knowing he would not return to the feast. And knowing from whom? From a messenger who comes within the door with marks of blood upon him. For if it was the death of Duncan which came upon him with a sudden reproach, should it not have been of Duncan that he would speak graciously when he was come to himself again? But of Duncan no word, nor of Macduff's safety on his way, but only of Banquo, and again of Banquo, of whom we knew no danger, but only his being delayed.

Then was it this way, that the king conspired with the strange men for Banquo's death, and knew from the messenger of the deed being done, and horror then overcame him at his guilt, so that he could but protest it was not his

<sup>1</sup> Act III, sc. iv.

own hand that did it? This would be but a poor acquittal, yet it might be that in real distraction he snatched at such a trifle to quell his remorse.

Turn it every way I could, all the events of the day and night made a black suspicion, and fitted together save for one that was against it, if in a real distraction of mind, when men reveal their secret thoughts, the king protested to some spectre of his vision that 'Thou canst not say I did it'.

'Would'st not fail?', the witches had said; waking sleep would tell the tale. This was mockery, for no tale was told, but a tangled riddle given me to read. Yet a waking sleep, true enough, and the words pointing to some bloody deed that concerned the king.

Could I be so near to assurance that, by all the signs of that murder, it was Macbeth and the queen who compassed the death of Duncan, and then so near assurance by the signs of the murder of Banquo that Macbeth was privy to it also, and then put away my doubts of both, supposing some mystery of either night to wear the same false appearance of Macbeth's guilt?

It was now that the other words of the witches came to my mind:

*Whose the feet that walks so late?  
Fails the feast to tempt his fate?*

And again:

*Flees the son, the father dead,  
This the riddle to be read.*

Here were sayings that now looked both backwards and

## THE SECOND MURDER

forwards, to the murder of Duncan, and to the murder of Banquo. There were two who failed the feast, Macbeth and Banquo. There was a son fled both then and now. There was devilment in such black arts of double meaning. It was all nothing that they had pretended to tell me, but only a game of words, that fitted strangely to what had happened.

So I resolved to put it all aside, the waking sleep and all the rest, and to return upon my own judgement. For the signs of the first murder came very close to Macbeth; and, if the signs of the murder of Banquo came near him also, they fell together and strengthened each other.

If the king were privy to the one murder, it was no longer to be unthought of, because of my loyalty to his house, that he should be privy to both.

Then I remembered how he had slain Duncan's guards, making their witness silent, and of how the thanes had looked with doubt on each other at this deed. What of the murderers of Banquo, if they still lived to his danger? But these, so it seemed, were men of Lochaber, with some ancient grudge against Banquo, and content to have settled their score.

But I must seek light another way and ask why Macbeth should seek the death of Banquo. Why should I suspect the king of a deed so foul, if no reason for it could be shown? And if the murders of Duncan and Banquo lay both at his door, why should these two stand especially in the enmity of Macbeth? Unless I were to believe that the king had some madness for blood, perhaps not yet appeased.

The first way was, that Duncan and Banquo both stood against some purpose of Macbeth. But with Duncan this could only be the throne, and the feud against the wrongful succession of the Atholls. Then he counted on putting aside the tanistry of Malcolm, though named by Duncan, as being wrongfully set up. But how should Banquo come into this affair, not being near in blood?

That the issue of Banquo should succeed was but the witches' prophecy. Yet it had worked on the mind of Banquo, so as to have led him, if I guessed rightly, to the journey which ended in death to him. And if Macbeth were given to such distractions as the banquet showed, and set any store by prophecies, might he not strike blindly at one whose exploits had won him fame enough to set his house high, despite distant claims of blood? But if Macbeth were wrought on by the witches, whose prophecies had truly set himself on the throne, it was Fleance he would fear, and not Banquo. Then had the murderers lost the best half of their affair when Fleance escaped?

Another way was, that the king feared Banquo, as having some knowledge of the murder of Duncan. Now Banquo was last to see Duncan in life, and, coming from the king's chamber, met with Macbeth in the court. And with him was Fleance. It might be that Banquo had betrayed a suspicion of Macbeth's purpose in being about then upon the terrace, so as to come under the enmity of Macbeth. True enough, Macbeth was with a servant, and went back from the court to his apartments. But Banquo was not to know of this, and

## THE SECOND MURDER

the wrath with which he spoke of the murder when it was known, and his desire to question a most bloody piece of work<sup>1</sup> (these were his words), may well have become a suspicion at the appearance of which Macbeth, his conscience being guilty, chafed, and feared an accusation.

And yet another way was that the king's malady was so increased by a sense of guilt that he would strike on every side at the lives of any whom he fancied that he had cause to fear. That some madness was upon him, the banquet showed. This I thought on at the time, and the more when some time passed, and brought news that Macduff's wife and son were murdered in their castle. That this blow was meant for Macduff himself I could scarcely doubt. His disobedience of the royal command to the council and banquet was taken ill by the king. The report was that his answer to the king's messenger was couched so defiantly that the messenger feared to carry it in the very words that were given him.<sup>2</sup> Then the news had come that Macduff was fled to England. Here was the first sign of open rebellion among the thanes, and the first revealing of distrust of the king. It was said, too, that the king had unguardedly disclosed to Lennox his design to avenge this treachery on the whole house of Macduff, and that Lennox, thereupon breaking his allegiance, had sent warning to Macduff's castle, and cast his lot against the king.<sup>3</sup>

It was the day of the great council, when the murder of Banquo became known, that the murmurs among the other

<sup>1</sup> Act II, sc. iii.

<sup>2</sup> Act III, sc. vi.

<sup>3</sup> Act IV, sc. ii.

thanes were scarcely hidden. I could believe that they showed no full-hearted support for the plans to oppose Malcolm, should he win the help of England. In the cold light of the morning, the strange utterances of the king at the banquet, coming after the murder of Duncan in Macbeth's castle, took on a sinister meaning. And the murder of Banquo, becoming then known, and the savage way it was done, turned murmuring into a scarce hidden enmity, and fear of where another blow might fall. They took but short leave of the king, and with looks that bespoke no return.

I too, looking more closely at these events, on which they looked more largely, felt no safety for myself, if anyhow I should show my deep distrust. But the physician may not desert from his charge, and the queen's malady grew upon her gravely. She was distraught and melancholy, so that we feared for her life, if the malady should press further upon her. In this anxiety, I had forgot for a time the weird sisters and their prophecies. How I was to remember them again, is the end of my tale.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *Waking Sleep*

THE months went past, but the kingdom was not at rest. We heard news of warlike preparations in ~~England~~, where Malcolm was received with favour, till his design to oppose Macbeth with strong forces could no longer be concealed. But, in Scotland itself, it became every month more plain that there were comings and goings among the thanes, and gatherings of men in this place and that, and the king's messengers, when he sent a summons to council, or to have a report of what was doing, were treated with neglect or disdain. On the allegiance of the Morays, because of the ancient feud with the Atholls, he could yet count; and the feud showed itself, as the other thanes fell away from the king, in many deeds of blood done secretly, but put to his account. There were whisperings against the tyrant, or the black Macbeth, so that our messengers feared for their own lives both in going about, and in being the bearers of such news.

Then the thanes no longer concealed their purpose. Near Birnam wood, the standard of revolt was raised. Menteith, Caithness, Angus, and Lennox gathered their forces, and declared for Malcolm, who was marching from England, with the help of Siward and many thousands of men.<sup>1</sup> The king chose to stand against them in his strong

<sup>1</sup> Act v, sc. ii.

castle of Dunsinane. Of his leaders, there was none left but Seyton, but his forces were in sufficient numbers to make the contest doubtful. It would be a desperate battle, not to decide the throne only, but because Malcolm, now come of full age, also sought vengeance for Dunstan. All crimes since Duncan's murder were now laid at Macbeth's door, for suspicion grew with suspicion both forward and backward. But danger could not keep the queen at Forres; she would not be persuaded, but went with her husband to Dunsinane. And her gentlewoman stayed by her, sharing the danger, as bound in duty, but tied also by affection.

Now my tale is near an end, for it is not my purpose to speak of battles and sieges. In the midst of the noise of war, my duty was to my patient, whether the victory went to one side or the other. And this tale would never have been written, if the king had been killed in the battle, and the queen had died, as indeed happened, and I had been thus parted from the house of the Macbeths. Then I would have gone my way, sometimes thinking over the murders of Duncan and Banquo, and the prophecies of the witches, and how I had been concerned about them. But, since it would all have remained in mystery, I would have had no cause for setting down this story. This has come to be written only because it came to be finished, and the mystery made clear, so that a tale can be told which has some fascination for the mind, like the reading of ciphers, or the unravelling of puzzles. Thus I say nothing of the siege of

## WAKING SLEEP

Dunsinane, but go on with my tale, to show how I came to know the truth about the murder of Duncan.

Now I had wavered between accusing the king, and the queen with him, of the murder of Duncan, and supposing some orgie in the night, which I could not put together, as if the king was killed by the treachery of some common hand, or to cover some theft or other petty crime by men not knowing what they did. Then came the events of the banquet, which at first dispelled my suspicion, till I went over them again after the murder of Banquo. And I could not be sure if the prophecies of the witches had led me to make more or less of these events than I should have made. It still ran in my mind how they had said that waking sleep should tell the tale—and had it done this?

( It was at Dunsinane that the queen's gentlewoman came with much concern to tell me that the queen's malady was increasing, and in a strange manner, so that she both spoke and acted as if unconscious of her words and deeds.) The gentlewoman desired my attendance to watch the queen in such a mood, not being willing to repeat to me what the queen had said, as if it were of grave import, or betraying the secrecy of the chamber to repeat.

But when I urged her to say what was the manner in which the queen so spoke and acted, she answered me that the queen walked by night, her eyes wide open, but their sense shut, as if awake, yet in a most fast sleep.)

Waking sleep! The prophecy of the weird sisters, and near their very words!

I was wrong, then, to suppose the distraction of Macbeth at the banquet to have been of this kind. I was in too great haste to read prophecies, and the weird sisters seemed to mock at my deception. No, not so; because of two words, was I to believe in them again?

It was my duty as her physician to know for myself how the queen was affected, and my duty was the excuse of my spying. Should I give weight to what she might say in her dreams? I resolved that I must watch, and give her words no far-fetched meanings, but only such as were plain.

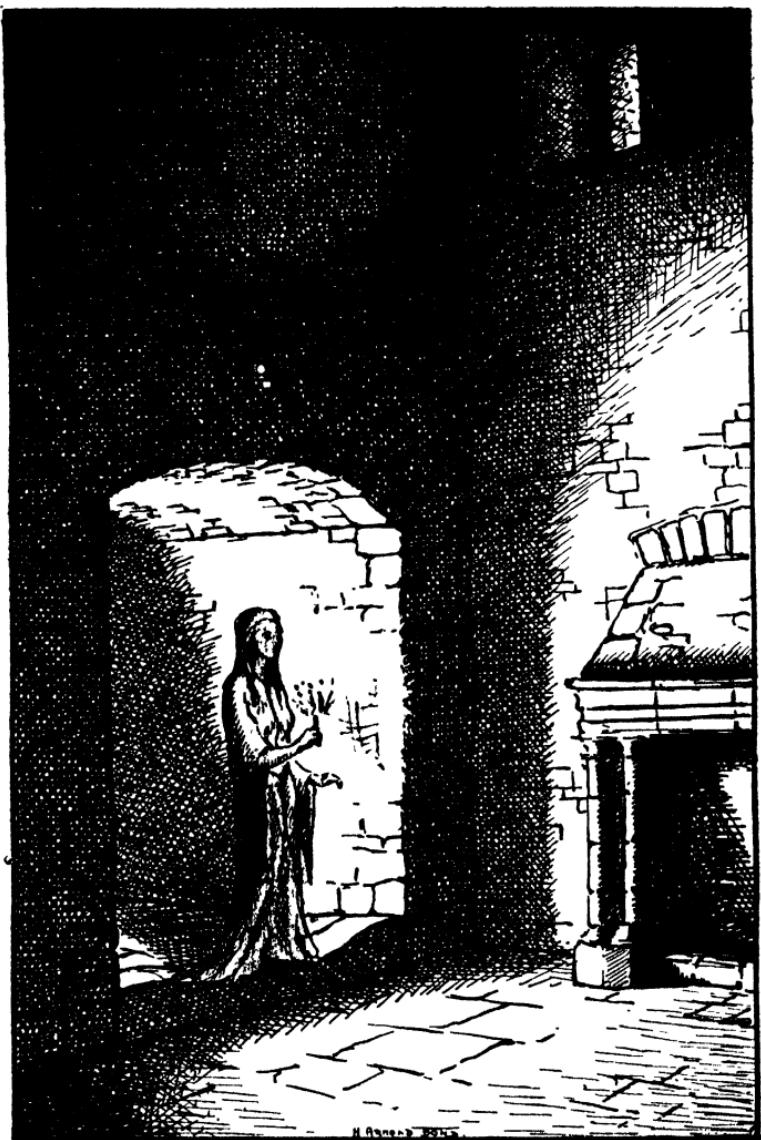
On the third night when we watched, the queen came from her chamber, bearing a lighted taper. Her eyes were open wide, but it was beyond doubt that she was in sleep. She rubbed the hand that bore the taper with the fingers of the other, as if to wash something from it. Then she spoke, and I set down her words, that my remembrance should not fail if they revealed anything of moment.

'Out, damned spot! out, I say! One; two; why, then, 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky! Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?'

And then:

'The thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean? No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that; you mar all with this starting.'

And then:



"Hell is Murky"

'Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.'

And then:

'Wash your hands, put on your night-gown; look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on's grave.'

And last:

'To bed, to bed; there's knocking at the gate. Come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed.'

As these words fell on my ears, mating my own mind about the murder of Duncan, I could say only, God forgive us all!

The gentlewoman, too, saw that these words were not the wanderings of fancy, but bespoke a guilty knowledge.

It was more than the physician that the queen needed, for a heart so sorely charged. But I advised the gentlewoman to keep eyes on her, and remove all means of annoyance from her. I feared how her life might end, if such reproaches were to grow upon her.

I dared speak no more then. I needed to think.

And, bidding the gentlewoman good-night, I fancied I heard again the laughter of the witches, as they chanted on that night,

*Would'st not fail?  
Waking sleep shall tell the tale!*

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Must the king not also know of how the queen spoke in

her waking sleep? I thought there was meaning in his question, when he asked me afterwards, how my patient did.<sup>1</sup> So I answered him only that she had fancies, which kept her from her rest. But I felt no safety in having such a secret on my mind, and the king, perchance the queen also, suspecting what I had learned. For those in waking sleep may fully ~~awake to some consciousness of having spoken, as after a dream.~~ And the king's anger, when he said that he desired none of my physic, might have warning in it, or I thought so, with the secret in my mind.

But I was soon discharged. The noise of the siege had begun, when the gentlewoman called me, and I found the queen dead. Her own hand had prepared the drink, as I reckoned she had prepared it for Duncan's chamberlains, and the drug had done its work.

The fatal potion which the queen had given herself added nothing by way of proof to what I had supposed to have been her part in the murder of Duncan. But it made it easier to suppose that she drugged the chamberlains, when she sought her own death in this way.

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{ How much had I learned more of the murder by what the queen had said in her sleep? For I thought that her words arose out of memory, not out of imagining.)

It was about two of the clock when Duncan was killed. 'One, two, 'tis time to do it.' Now, I had heard the clock

<sup>1</sup> Act v, sc. iii.

strike two; and this was about the time of the knocking at the south entry, and the murmurs of voices beneath my chamber. And it was about this time too that Lady Macbeth prepared a drink for Macbeth. So then she also prepared the possets of the guards, and took them to the king's chamber, for no servant had done this. Then, when Macbeth's drink was ready, the guards were drugged, and the way open.

But now it was plain that this was not all of her part in the murder. She had seen the body of Duncan bleeding from his wounds. 'Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?' I could scarce believe that she had slain the king alone. Then did both go to the king's chamber, and Macbeth kill the king with his own dagger, while she watched the guards, to be sure that the drug kept them asleep? Or did her words mean that both had struck the king, each with one of the guards' daggers? I thought this was not likely, but that one would watch, and that no woman could deal such blows at the king.

I thought that the signs of the murder would agree with there having been two taking part in it. For the murderer had without doubt rushed from the chamber, carrying a dagger, or more than one, still dripping. It might be that he came back himself, after rushing out in fright. But another might be watching outside the room who restored his courage. 'Fie, my lord, a soldier, and afraid.' And it was likely enough that Lady Macbeth was at hand to watch in the passage, having made things ready for the deed.

For if she conspired at such a crime, could she refrain from watching while it was being done?

But now there was more than this: for Lady Macbeth's own hands had been bloodstained. This was what mostly disturbed her mind. 'Here's the smell o' the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.' And she would seem to wash her hands, so the gentlewoman said, for as much as a quarter of an hour. Now this was more than thinking her hands bloodstained, only because she was a partner in the murder. This act of washing her hands, and what she said in doing it, how they still smelt of blood, showed that the king's blood had been upon them.

Then, if she had been with Macbeth in the room, while the king still bled, it might have been that Macbeth, being afraid, rushed forth with the daggers, and she went after him, and rallied him. But, with both of them together in the king's chamber, I thought that Macbeth would not have rushed forth in that way. This was more like the fright of one alone. And, if Lady Macbeth spoke out of her memory when she chided him for being a soldier and afeard, these were more like words said by some one who waited outside, than said in the chamber to some one rushing out from it. So I thought, when I weighed them.

Then it must have been somehow in this wise. Lady Macbeth watched without the king's chamber, and not within it. When Macbeth had killed Duncan, he took fright after such a deed, and rushed from the room, and Lady

Macbeth awaited him, and rallied him on not having finished the plot against the chamberlains. So they went back to the room to finish it, and placed the daggers as they were found, having smeared some blood upon them, whether there was already blood on them or not. And in this dreadful work of smearing the weapons and the faces of the chamberlains, Lady Macbeth had a hand. It might even be that Macbeth, having struck so many blows at the king, had enough of horror, and that it was Lady Macbeth who went back alone to finish the deed.

But, if it were so, the question whether one dagger or two was used to kill the king became more clear. For, if Macbeth had killed Duncan with his own dagger, it would have dripped on only one side of the passage when he rushed out to where Lady Macbeth was waiting; and, if it was Lady Macbeth who went back to the king's apartment, she would not have carried Macbeth's dagger back with her. So the bloodstains on both sides would not be explained. But if Macbeth carried two daggers out of the place, the stains on both sides would show as they did; and the daggers which he carried would be the very ones with which the king was killed. So I was confirmed in what I have said before, that the king was killed by the daggers of his guards. And this was the more likely, if the plot was against the chamberlains as well as against the king. But what part was played by each of Macbeth and his wife in the carrying to and fro of the daggers, I cannot tell with sureness.

Then was it a part of their plot that Macbeth was to slay

## WAKING SLEEP

the guards in the morning, before they could speak? For, had they spoken, they would have shown it unlikely that they could have done such a deed in such a manner; and they were trusted men, who would be believed. It was a deep plan, then, that some one other than Macbeth should be made to discover the murder, and that he should rush quickly to kill the guards in seeming anger. For thus he had a witness of how things were before he killed them. Was it by design that Macbeth left the banquet, so that Macduff and not himself was ordered to wait on the king betimes?

That the knocking at the south entry was the cause of Macbeth's being afraid, I could guess, but his fear might have come only from the deed itself. That at some time they were alarmed by the knocking which I also heard in the night, was shown by Lady Macbeth's own words in her sleep.

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Thus having set out to trace how the murder was done, I have come to an end, and have made a tale which others may one day read, whether they heed that the murder was done in truth, or whether they care for the tale only. Let it be only supposed that such a murder was done, leaving such signs behind it, and such persons, so lodged, and so disposed, and such events about the time of the deed, and after it, how shall the guilt be imputed? So, if Macbeth be forgotten, my tale need not be.

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Whether Macbeth, ~~was~~ guilty also of the murder of Banquo, and Lady Macbeth privy to it, is not so easy to decide. Here no signs of the deed were left, but other things which might point to it, in the manner of Macbeth's conduct. I myself hold him guilty of it, the more so when I hold it proved that he did the more dreadful deed before it.

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Should I think further of the weird sisters, because their prophecy seemed to have come true in Macbeth's frenzy at the banquet, and came true in the end in Lady Macbeth's waking sleep? My mind goes this way and that about it. It is held by many that there is witchcraft which can tell the future, and many doubtless have spoken with witches, and thought that they foretold what was to happen. But others may have met with weird sisters, and found their prophecies vain. These would make no report, so that only the prophecies which came true would be heard of. And out of many such prophecies of witches, doubtless some must seem to come true. So by a mistake in observing all the cases, they are wrongly supposed to have more than natural powers. Yet I make no judgement. Many things there may be in heaven and earth, more than comes in my philosophy.

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